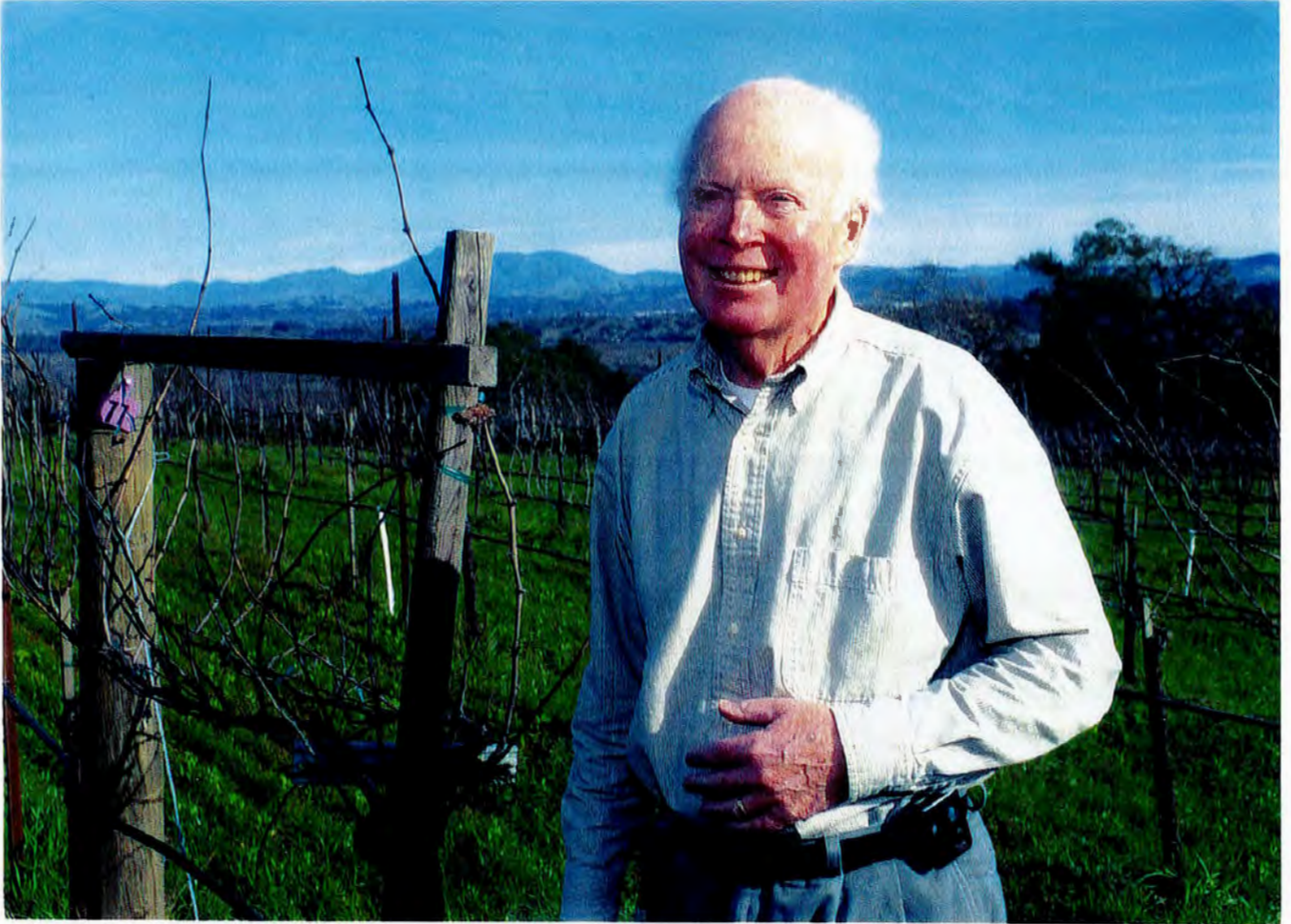


DAVIS BYNUM
A CREATIVE WINE PIONEER

An Oral History

Interviewed by Carole Hicke
2001



DAVIS BYNUM

2002

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INTERVIEW HISTORY

Davis Bynum has been a Sonoma County wine pioneer several times over. He was the first to build a winery on Westside Road, first to bottle a single-vineyard-designated Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley, and was the first customer of that noted grape source, Rochioli Vineyard. Davis also started a futures program in 1966. His efforts to promote organic farming have won him the Sonoma Green Business Certificate of Compliance and the Bay Award by The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors.

But above all, it is his Pinot Noir that has put him in the forefront of winemaking history.

Starting his career as a journalist, Bynum left that job at age 40 and, with his wife Dorothy, opened a winery in an Albany, California garage. In 1973 they purchased the River Bend Ranch on Westside Road, and that year he produced his first Pinot Noir with Rochioli's grapes. His winemaking skills came from extensive studies of the information available from the University of California, but he developed his own themes – innovation and continuity. While Davis devoted himself to the art of making wine, Dorothy's talent for painting produced distinctive labels for the bottles.

In his oral history, Davis talks about his youth and education, his early work for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and his first winemaking efforts. In addition to a full discussion of the evolution of the Davis Bynum Winery, he describes viticulture techniques and his organic farming methods.

A gracious individual who is an ideal narrator, Davis Bynum's recollections were tape-recorded during two sessions on December 4 and 5, 2001. The interview took place in his office at the winery with a rainstorm raging outside. Interruption of electricity caused some concern for the bottling operations taking place, but this problem didn't last. He had looked over the outline I sent to him and talked with pleasure about his winemaking career. He carefully reviewed the draft transcript and added a few corrections and clarifications.

An oral history is, by definition, an informal discussion, so we have attempted to retain a sense of spontaneous conversation, as well as ensuring that the narrator's thoughts come through clearly. Words in brackets have been inserted editorially for clarity.

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Carole Hicke
April 2002

I BACKGROUND AND FAMILY

[Interview 1: December 4, 2001]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

ANCESTORS

HICKE: I'd like to start with when and where you were born.

BYNUM: I was born in Pasadena, California, January 2, 1925 and spent the first six or seven years of my life in Monrovia, where my father had grown up and gone to school and where my mother was a schoolteacher.

HICKE: Before we go further, let's back up so you can tell me what you know about your ancestors.

BYNUM: I can go back quite a ways if you want me to.

HICKE: Yes, great!

BYNUM: I've done some research on it and found that the Bynums came over very early to Virginia and settled in or around Jamestown, on the James River.

HICKE: Do you mean really early, like in the 1600s?

BYNUM: The first one came in 1616 on a ship called the *Susan*. It's interesting, because his name was John Bynum, and he apparently died without any heirs. I think his daughter stayed in London and his son preceded him in death. Then suddenly, about 25 years later, there are all these records for a John Bynum, who was on the other side of the river, practically in the same area.

So there must have been a family relationship there. In order to find out what it was I'd have to go to London. But one of the Bynums was a shareholder in the Virginia Company of London, and so I think what he was probably doing was sending his reprobate cousins and brothers and nephews over here, where they were going to lead a very tough life, because all the descriptions of it make it sound really difficult.

HICKE: Is Bynum an English name?

BYNUM: Yes, it is. From what I understand, they were originally Welsh, and they moved from Wales to the Norfolk area near London.

HICKE: And no doubt shortened the name!

BYNUM: And shortened the name. It was Ap Eynon probably, Ap being the equivalent of Mc or Mac in Scotland. They spelled it Baynham in London but it was pronounced By-num, so when they came over here they gradually — there are still a few that call themselves Baynham, but for the most part they converted to Bynum very early on, because that's how it was pronounced and it was easier for people to write it down.

HICKE: We got as far as John Bynum.

BYNUM: John then had several sons and grandsons and great-grandsons named John, until finally one of those Johns had a son named Gray. He was born in the early 1700s, I believe, 1735 or 1740. He was one of the people who believed in the Revolution and independence. He ended up marrying the sister of Wade Hampton, the Revolutionary War general. That's why I named my son Hampton. That family was rather large.

My great-great-grandfather, Gray Bynum Jr., broke away from them and went out West to Missouri very early, in 1807, right after the Lewis and Clark expedition. In fact they got out there too early and too far, and Meriwether Lewis, who was governing that whole district, made them go back 100 miles, because there wasn't any government protection for them. But the next year they went on to what is now the area around Kansas City and staked out their claims, and they built a fort called Fort Cooper. My great-great-grandfather married one of the Coopers; he was part of the Cooper party that came from Pennsylvania.

HICKE: Were they ranching or farming?

BYNUM: My great-great-grandfather and his son were mainly stockmen, raising horses, and they were involved in going out and exploring. I know that the Coopers, I think Stephen Cooper, went as far as Santa Fe, New Mexico, before the trail was firmly established. You'll find a lot about Stephen Cooper in The Bancroft Library.

HICKE: He probably helped establish the trail.

BYNUM: I would think he certainly helped. His father, Benjamin Cooper, who was a colonel in the Continental Army, did a lot of exploring around the Southwest. His brother, Sarchel Cooper,

was my great-great-great-grandfather, and he was killed practically the last week or month of the War of 1812, just sitting in front of his house. All their houses were barricaded inside the fort, and I guess he was killed by an Indian arrow. Somebody found a crack in the wall and finished him off. There are a couple of stories about that that I've read in history books that are sort of poignant.

HICKE: He was inside this Fort Cooper?

BYNUM: Yes, right. Anyway, eventually my great-great grandfather and Nancy Cooper had children, including five sons, all of whom came West, starting in 1848 with the oldest one. He came to California and settled around Fairfield, in the Yolo County area. My great-grandfather was a doctor and also a stockman. He and a brother came out in 1853, and then the next one came in, I don't know, subsequent to that date. One of them went to Montana.

HICKE: These are all Bynums?

BYNUM: Yes. Stephen went to Montana, and as all Bynums do, wherever they go they seem to name a town after themselves. This town has about four buildings, I think, but it's named Bynum, Montana. It's still there. Some wealthy Texan came up and was enamored with it and bought the whole town. [laughter]

HICKE: Have you been there?

BYNUM: No, I haven't been there, but friends have stopped there and they've sent me pictures. No, I've never been to Montana. I'd like to sometime.

HICKE: You missed that on your recent journey around North America?

BYNUM: Yes. I was planning on it and I would have gone to Montana had I stayed on Amtrak coming home, because I was headed for Portland to visit friends there and the train takes you through Montana on the northern route.

HICKE: Oh, well, next trip.

BYNUM: Next trip. I'm going to do one next spring. That's a wonderful trip on Canadian Rail. They have a train trip where you don't stay on the train overnight; they have no sleeping accommodations at all. What you do is leave Vancouver and go to Kamloops and stay overnight there, the first night, in a hotel, and do things. They have a theater nearby, a little junction, and you can go to the theater. They have those plays that are forever running, like "The Drunkard" was in Los Angeles for so many years.

Then you go to Banff and stay overnight for as long as you want. Then you pick up the train and go to Jasper. So it's something I do want to do. I enjoyed the train, I really did. I enjoyed meeting all the people on it. I shared my dinner table every night with someone different; it was interesting.

HICKE: OK, we got as far as Bynum, Montana.

BYNUM: Most of them came to Yolo County, California, and my great-grandfather set up a medical practice there. His brother, who had come first, convinced him he should move to Lake County, because that's where all the action was going to be. [laughter] Fishing and hunting and things like that. So he moved up there, and of course he found there weren't any people there to practice medicine on, so he built a hotel.

He did practice medicine, however, and he used to come down once or twice every month on a route that brought him into Calistoga and on down the Napa Valley, and back up. He had a

lot of patients, apparently. My dad talked to some old-timers up there who remembered their father's birth was attended by a doctor from Lake County. But I don't know what people did if they were about to have a baby and he wasn't coming by yet.

My mother's family was from Norway. My grandmother and grandfather met over here, but they came over when they were about sixteen, first to the Minneapolis area and then they settled in North Dakota.

HICKE: What was their name?

BYNUM: Grosfield. My mother was born in Castleton, North Dakota. That was sort of interesting, too, because her father was not well, and the doctor said he should go to a warmer climate. So he left his wife and two girls in North Dakota while he went out to Los Angeles, where he had some relatives living. He got a job and he wrote to them to come on out, but by the time they got there, he had died of pneumonia.

My grandmother and her two daughters arrived in Los Angeles with the only some relatives somewhere near Compton. She managed to send both of the girls to Stanford [University], which I understand was not a major expense in those days.

HICKE: But still, it was unusual in those days.

BYNUM: They both became teachers; my mother majored in the classics.

HICKE: What was her full name?

BYNUM: Helen Grosfield. She married my dad, and they were divorced when I was about five.

HICKE: And your dad's name?

BYNUM: Lindley Davis Bynum. I am Lindley Davis Bynum, Jr. When I was in junior high school, I dropped the Lindley, started going by Davis, even though it's still on my driver's license and some documents.

HICKE: When we finish the oral history book, do you want it to read Lindley Davis Bynum or L. Davis Bynum or Davis Bynum?

BYNUM: I think Davis Bynum; it's a lot simpler. I do sign my name Davis Bynum, but I also sign it L. Davis Bynum. I guess I'm one of those "also known as."

HICKE: Yes, aka —

CHILDHOOD

BYNUM: I grew up in Southern California, mostly in small towns — Monrovia, which I loved, and in San Gabriel and in San Marino and in Glendale. I went to high school in Glendale, and then I went to Stanford. I dropped out of Stanford to go into the army.

HICKE: Just a minute; we need to back up. Do you have any siblings?

BYNUM: No.

HICKE: OK. And what do you remember about family activities when you were growing up?

BYNUM: It was a close family, especially considering that my parents were divorced. My mother's family was very close to us, and so was my father's family. I spent as much time with them as I did with my mother's family. I was the only child of that generation.

HICKE: No cousins?

BYNUM: I had aunts and great-aunts and my two grandmothers, and so I felt like the world sort of rotated around me. I never felt any lack of love. It was just a nice experience, growing up in a split family, so to speak. We all were reasonably close to each other, even after the divorce.

HICKE: What did you do for Christmas and birthdays?

BYNUM: I spent Christmas Eve with my dad's family and Christmas Day with my mother's family. My poor father — he was living in Monrovia, I was living in Glendale or San Marino or San Gabriel, and he had to collect everybody from all over to eat at my grandmother's house in Pasadena; he'd bring her sisters from Monrovia to Pasadena, then he'd pick me up. When I look back on it now — at the time I just thought it was the natural thing to do, but now I think my poor dad must have been exhausted by the time the holidays were over.

Then, of course, when he remarried, his wife was from Pasadena, and her family had to be included also. He was running a taxi service!

HICKE: What kinds of things did you like to have for breakfast and lunch and dinner?

BYNUM: I've always had eggs, and I still have eggs every day and I love them. I also had cereal a lot when I was a kid, both hot and cold. For lunch at school we had sandwiches. My mother made some pretty good sandwiches: cream cheese with dates, for instance. A lot of avocado.

When we lived in Monrovia, we lived across the street from a big orange orchard; in those days that was still the thing out there, and I was constantly eating oranges. We had a couple of avocado trees, and my grandmother had a huge one. She was

next door to us. She had those little, black avocados; they're called Mexicola, with very thin skin. The flavor is so wonderful, it's unbelievable.

HICKE: I suppose they can't be shipped?

BYNUM: No. Each one would have to be wrapped individually in tissue paper, and I don't think they are worth that much. But they are magnificent.

For dinner — I had practically all my dinners with my mother and my stepfather. She was a very plain cook, but a good cook. We had a lot of roasts, roasted chicken, some fish, usually barracuda, which is a good fish; it really is. A lot of meat loaf, that sort of thing. She probably overcooked everything a little bit. But I never lacked for a good meal, and I liked it all.

HICKE: But you did grow up during the time of the Depression.

LINDLEY BYNUM

BYNUM: Yes, I did. Both my mother and stepfather were teachers, so they had a constant income all during that time, even though it wasn't huge. My father worked for the Huntington Library at the time, and his job was secure. He went to work for them about 1930 and was there until 1941, at which time he then went to the University [of California]. His job there was special assistant to the president; I think it was a job that Robert Sproul created for him. His job at the Huntington Library was basically collecting source materials and doing oral histories.

HICKE: You said you went with him sometimes.

BYNUM: I went with him; it was the most marvelous experience. There was a guy named John Pleasant. The Pleasant family moved to Southern California, and he had a farm in the city of Orange. I went with dad to take his oral history, and he found more things for me to do. He got a horse out and put me up on the horse and just said, "Go on."

I'd never been on a horse more than a couple of times in my life, and I was scared to death. But I rode it down the road for a while, and the thing was so gentle...

HICKE: You got it turned around?

BYNUM: I got it turned around, got back and got off of it — don't ask me how! Then he took me out to gather honey from the beehives. Then I sat and listened to him talk, and that I'll never forget. He came across the Plains when he was five or six years old. I was about nine or ten, and he was in his nineties at the time.

HICKE: So that was before the Gold Rush?

BYNUM: He came out before the Gold Rush, yes. I think he arrived in Los Angeles about 1840 or '41. But the interesting thing was when he was talking about the buffalo herds. He said you can't imagine how big they were in 1840. They were just as far as you could see. He said it looked like you could get up and walk across their backs, and that phrase has always stuck in my mind.

Then about 30 years ago I was reading a biography of William Wolfskill, and William Wolfskill was the founder of a school in Los Angeles.¹ It said that on opening day, one of the first students to show up at the school was little Johnny Pleasant, who was the old guy that I encountered with my dad. It was really

¹ William Wolfskill was a fur trader and California pioneer in the 1820s and 1830s. The school he financed for his own and his neighbors' children was the first American educational attempt in the state.

exciting. I jumped up and ran to read it to my wife, and explained to her why it was important.

So my dad did some collecting of source material, in addition to taking oral histories.

HICKE: When he took an oral history, did he just take notes?

BYNUM: He had something like a wire recorder. They didn't have tape recorders in those days, but it was a wire recorder.

HICKE: And then he'd get it transcribed?

BYNUM: He'd get it transcribed, yes.

HICKE: And are these oral histories in the Huntington Library?

BYNUM: They should be, yes. He went all over the state collecting whenever he could get true source material related to California history, which was his field. He would either buy it for the library or try to talk them out of it, which in most cases was the case.

HICKE: Did he graduate as a historian?

BYNUM: No, he didn't. That's one of the sad parts of his life: he dropped out of school, and he was self-taught. He was offered teaching positions and he couldn't take them, couldn't take them. I don't think he would have liked a teaching position. I don't think he was a terribly good teacher. But he was a very inquisitive person, and had a very deep curiosity about California and California history, and he became known as an authority on California history.

HICKE: He sort of carried on what was started by Hubert Howe Bancroft.

BYNUM: I don't know that much about Bancroft, but I do know that dad loved what he was doing, and I think did a very good job. I don't know if Bancroft took any oral histories; he collected source material.

His office was down at UCLA. Some of the material he collected went into UCLA, I guess the Clark Library, but most of it went to The Bancroft. Also, he was a friend of Robert Gordon Sproul. If they weren't good friends when they started out, they became friends, to the point where he and Herman Wente and Walter Ficklin had a group called the Wine Vagabonds. They'd get together and have a big lunch somewhere and then go touring wineries.

My dad retired and moved to the Napa Valley, and I remember one time they had lunch at his place and then headed for Hanzell [Vineyard] near Sonoma, and subsequent to that they were going on out to Korbel [Champagne Cellars], which apparently Herman Wente had some interest in. I was never sure what that interest was; I gather it was some financial interest. So they did that for a few years.

HICKE: I want you to be sure to tell me about your father's interest in wine.

BYNUM: I don't know that he always drank wine, and I don't know when he got so interested in it that he became first a judge at the Los Angeles County Fair, then a judge at the State Fair, and he knew everybody in the wine business. And they all knew him and liked him. When I started the winery, I had sort of an instant introduction to all these people.

I had been a wine judge for a couple of years at the Sacramento Fair at the same time dad was, so I met a lot of the Davis people. That was back in the days when Davis basically ran the

judging — Maynard Amerine and Harold Berg and Dinsmore Webb, all the pooh-bahs. It was fun!

It was interesting because the first year I did it they decided we were going to have to pass a test before we could become judges, so we all had to go up to the Sacramento Fairground, and we took this test to see whether you could determine varietal character, whether you could determine tannins in the wine, whether you could determine this and that, varying grades of acidity. There were a couple of people there who were big names in the wine business, who had written books about it, collected wines. They couldn't do it.

There was this one fellow who was running around saying, "What do you think this Number Four is?" But the funny thing was that everybody was coded differently. Even if you had one through seven on your table and the guys next to you have one through seven, they would be juggled around so they were different. He failed. A couple of people I know failed.

Fortunately, I passed it and dad passed it, so we both judged. We weren't always there at the same time, because people judging red wines wouldn't necessarily be there when the ones judging whites were.

HICKE: Did you just do white wines and he did reds?

BYNUM: I did reds the first year I was up there, and then the next year I did sparkling wines and dessert wines. That was not a pleasant experience, I'll tell you; after judging dessert wines all day, all I wanted was a beer!

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

HICKE: How did your dad become a wine judge?

BYNUM:

You know, I'm not quite clear on that, because I went away in the army for three years. When I came back, there was a story about the judging at the Los Angeles County Fair and his picture was featured in the paper. Up until that time, I knew that he had the interest but I wasn't really aware of it. And I wasn't into wines at that time, even though I can remember from the earliest days my mother and stepfather used to spend time out in the desert, and I'd go with them. Always a mandatory stop was one of the wineries in Cucamonga to buy wine to take with them, usually Grignolino, which wasn't bad, it really wasn't.

But my dad always had wine on his table, and at that point I wasn't that interested in pursuing it. It wasn't until after I got out of the army, and after I got married in 1946, that I got some material to read from dad, and he kept telling me about the different wine districts and wineries. And I went visiting wineries with him.

II EDUCATION, MARRIAGE, AND WORLD WAR II

HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE

HICKE: Can I stop you here temporarily? I want to get that eventually, but I want to back up again.

BYNUM: Sure.

HICKE: You went to high school in Glendale, you said. What subjects did you like?

BYNUM: Very general. English, history, and my mathematics — I was always good at math but I didn't have any interest in it, so I didn't go past algebra. Later on, that was unfortunate, because when I went to Stanford, I was taking English and history, and my parents said, "The war is with us — that was World War II — and you should study engineering." So I switched at their urging to an engineering major, and that was a huge, huge mistake.

It was way above me. They were using calculus, and I had not gone beyond high school algebra, so I was frantically taking those courses. But at the same time I was taking physics and

other things that I needed as a background. I didn't do very well. So I switched back to my own major and was doing fine again, then I went into the army halfway through the quarter.

HICKE: I suppose you were interested in Stanford partly because of your mother going there?

BYNUM: My father went there, though he didn't finish. My stepfather graduated from Stanford, my mother graduated from Stanford, my aunt graduated from Stanford.

HICKE: You didn't have a chance!

BYNUM: So I thought the college life was red while I was growing up. So I went there and was planning to go back after the war. But during the war I met my wife, and she was from Berkeley and was going to Cal, and I liked Berkeley a lot, and I liked Cal, so I went back to Cal and graduated from Cal.

MARRIAGE TO DOROTHY MUNSON

HICKE: Can you tell me your wife's name, please?

BYNUM: Dorothy Munson.

HICKE: And you got married in 1946?

BYNUM: Yes. We met in 1943, which is sort of interesting — interesting to me, anyway; I don't know about other people. My father was a good friend of Ansel and Virginia Adams, and I had a furlough in the army, and my mother and stepfather were back in the Sierra at Merced Lake up above Yosemite. My dad was heading for Berkeley and so he was going to drop me off in Yosemite. He took me by to visit Virginia and Ansel, when I was on my

way up. My wife, Dorothy, was working for them in the studio, but she wasn't there when I came through. But when I came back after a week of backpacking in the Sierra she was there and that's when I met her. That was in 1943.

HICKE: What was she doing?

BYNUM: She was running the studio, making sales, doing that sort of thing.

MORE ON STANFORD UNIVERSITY

HICKE: Going back a little bit, is there anything about Stanford that we should get on the record?

BYNUM: Well, I liked Stanford, very much, I don't think there's anything — I've heard it said that somebody could go to Stanford for six months, then you can go to Harvard, or Cal Tech or some place like that for the rest of his college career and he would still think of himself as a Stanford man. I've known people like that as a matter of fact. [laughter] I know somebody who went there with my dad, he was there for a year and spent four years at Cal Tech and still thought of himself as a Stanford man. And I never was that way. I wasn't that enamored of it; I did like it. I liked it partly because my parents had gone there, and family, and yet something about Palo Alto to me wasn't as interesting as Berkeley. I hope nobody who feels strongly about Stanford reads this oral history. [laughter]

PART-TIME JOBS

HICKE: Before we get you into the army I haven't asked you about any jobs or part-time work that you did.

BYNUM: The only part-time work I had in high school was in a gas station, and I saved enough money to go up into the Sierra and go fishing. While I was in school I didn't work except when I was in college, at Cal, after I was married. But I didn't when I was in high school.

HICKE: What about other activities, sports, you mentioned fishing?

BYNUM: I always likek sports. In grammar school I loved to play baseball, soccer and sand lot football. I did go out for track in high school, ran the 660. Other activities — the summertime it was either — we had a place at Laguna Beach, and it was either down there or up in the mountains. Sometimes I would stay around home. Whenever I went on vacation with my dad for two weeks it was always on a camping trip somewhere up in the Sierra. When my mother and stepfather went on true vacations — they didn't consider the beach their true vacation — they liked the Sierra. So they'd backpack in, or horse pack in to some camp in the interior of the Sierra and then spend a couple, three weeks there.

HICKE: You had an outdoors family.

BYNUM: Yes. It really taught me a wonderful feeling for nature from both sides. From my father and my mother and stepfather. You hear so often that you have a stepfather and he doesn't walk down the same way as you do, so to speak, and I always had a good rapport with my stepfather. He would often take my side, you know, against the world when there was something to be fought. But my father and I had a very good relationship.

LINDLEY BYNUM: HISTORIAN, WRITER, BOOK COLLECTOR

BYNUM: I might say about my dad, one of the early things I remember about him, he was very interested in Western Indian culture, Southwest Indian culture, you know the Navajo and the Hopi. There a couple of tribes — I went with him a couple of times to Indian ceremonies, once to a wedding. There were a couple of tribes into which he had been initiated. He would just disappear for a few days at a time when they were having some ceremony. He was very interested in that and also knew a lot about it too.

HICKE: Did he ever write any books on the Indians?

BYNUM: He wrote in conjunction with Idwal Jones a book on Sheriff Biscaluz who was a Los Angeles County Sheriff, Eugene Biscaluz. Then he wrote that little book on wine. Most of the writings he did were forewords to historical documents, things that the Grabhorn Press might be printing, or the Ward Ritchie Press, or one of those.

He was a member of the Book Club of Northern California and also the Zamarano Club of Los Angeles. Many of his friends were book people, book collectors. I can remember going with dad when one of the things he'd do, in addition to collecting material, would be to give speeches at various clubs — I don't know if they were service clubs or what have you — and wherever he went he would always go into a bookstore. He would always find first editions of some book that he could bring back and sell or keep, as the case may be. His main interest was in Western literature, Western history and journals.

HICKE: So he collected books for himself as well as for the university?

BYNUM: Yes he did.

HICKE: Do you have those collections?

BYNUM: No, I don't. He was constantly in financial hot water. So consequently he was constantly selling his books or his book collections for this or that. Then he would re-collect and re-establish them. But when he died he had a nice collection of books, and my stepmother donated them to the Robert Louis Stevenson Library in St. Helena. Either that or to the St. Helena Library; I think it was the Stevenson Library. So I didn't end up with any of those. I still have a few of his books that have forewords by him and when he did the text for another book or journal of a trip by Juan de Anza. That was interesting. I think he always wanted to write something more, like a novel. I don't think he really was a novelist in that sense, or a writer in that sense I should say, anymore than I am. I wrote when I was in the newspaper business, that was my job, but I don't think I could write a novel. I don't think he could.

HICKE: What inspired him to write the book on wine?

BYNUM: Well, his interest in wine I'm sure. He spent all those years judging it, and basically what he did was to describe wine, the enjoyment of it and the type of wine that he was discussing, and then the medals they got at these fairs. He would pick maybe the six or seven wines that had won the most medals at these fairs. And in those days there weren't very many wineries.

At some point a couple of them refused to participate in the judging, like Beaulieu, and their reason was they only had a few wines to enter and there were others like Italian Swiss Colony which would enter 40 wines and get all these medals. Then they'd advertise all the medals. I thought it was sort of a weak excuse for not joining but we have reached the point now where we're dropping out of all these things. It costs a lot of money but I'll get to that later though. It doesn't do much good.

HICKE: Yes, in 1955 there weren't a lot of people who were drinking fine wines, were there?

BYNUM: No, there weren't, and I think in a sense it was nicer back then than it is now, as people weren't so serious about wine. They just took it as a daily accompaniment to food. Now if you don't get all these awards, and so many points, and if you don't put it up in a package that looks like it's worth twice as much as it is... It was much more relaxed in those days. Even when I started the winery in 1965 it was much more relaxed and laid back. Wine was something you drank with your meal, not something you collected necessarily. Some people did have collections though.

MILITARY SERVICE

HICKE: Back to Stanford, you were either drafted or joined the army?

BYNUM: I tried to enlist in the Air Corps, and twice I took the exam and my left eye was 20/25 and at that time they weren't letting you in unless you were 20/20.

HICKE: You couldn't even get in?

BYNUM: I couldn't get into the Air Corps as a pilot, so I just went into the army. I was drafted before the end of the quarter.

HICKE: This was '43?

BYNUM: Yes, '43. I was drafted — I received a notice in January of '43 and I reported the eighth of February in '43. In the army I went through basic training at Camp Roberts, then I went through what they called an Army Specialized Training Program, which sent me to UCLA, of all places, and I was "barracked" in a barracks which was the Phi Delt house at UCLA, which

happened to be in the 500 block, I believe, on Gayley, and my father was in the next block. Or I was in the 400 and he was in the 500, I can't remember.

The interesting thing is when they pulled me out of Camp Roberts they sent me to Stanford to enroll in this ASTP program. I was there for a week and they shipped us out. I had a furlough from that because I contacted pneumonia and mononucleosis at the same time, so I was in the hospital for a couple of weeks, and then when I got out the semester was going to end in two weeks so they just sent me on furlough; so I had three weeks off. Then I met my wife, and it was a good three weeks. I was in the army for three years. I went to UCLA for almost a year.

HICKE: What were you doing at UCLA?

BYNUM: I was taking physics and chemistry and all these things that I flunked at Stanford, but I got "As" in them in the army. [laughter] Well after taking them once you would think you would get an "A" especially when everyone else around you was a dunderhead.

HICKE: What were you being trained for?

BYNUM: I never figured it out, [laughter] some kind of an engineering program I guess, and it must have been. I never knew what they had that program for, I really don't. I think they broke up the program about the end of March or April of 1944. I went back to Camp Roberts and was assigned as part of a cadre for a mortar company, big mortars, 4.2 inch mortars. We put together a battalion there, then I went to Colorado, then Oklahoma for training, then overseas to England — didn't get to England until about five months after the D-Day invasion.

Then we were in England for a while, then I went over to France and got in on the tail end of the campaign in Europe — went all the way across Germany with my mortars and we fired several missions, but that was about it. The German army, except for the die hards, was pretty well defeated by that time. Then I got back to the U.S., and after a while got out of the army. I actually spent a quarter or semester at UCLA.

HICKE: Was this in '45, or '46?

BYNUM: Let's see, '46, because my wife and I went up to Berkeley from UCLA and got married, and then I went to Cal until I graduated.

HICKE: In what program?

BYNUM: I was a history major, and I was going to take a graduate degree, and went back for one semester. I was working at the *Chronicle* at the time, and Hampton had been born, and it just seemed to be a little overwhelming.

HICKE: Were any of your history professors particularly memorable?

BYNUM: Oh yes, yes, Professor Hicks. I took a lot of Political Science too from Professor Sleuter, I think it was. Then I took a fair amount of English courses, literature courses.

My most memorable professor was James Hart. He taught a class called The Literature of the Western Movement, which he created himself, and it only lasted for maybe a year or two. I don't know why, because it was one of the most interesting classes I've ever taken. I do remember he was going to have George Stewart come in and give us the lecture on Robert Louis Stevenson, and I was so excited about that because I had read several of Stewart's books. So I came really early and I got in a front row, and 15 minutes later I was fighting off sleep. It was the dullest lecture I've ever come across in my life. [laughter]

James Hart was flamboyant and he could rivet you with what he was talking about, but George Stewart is a — it is interesting because he later became a customer after I started the winery.

HICKE: You didn't tell him about your first experience with him?

BYNUM: No, I did not, no. [laughter] I don't remember too many others.

III CAREER AS JOURNALIST

WORKING FOR THE *SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE*

HICKE: OK, you graduated and how did you happen to find your job at the *Chronicle*?

BYNUM: I had the idea at that time that I wanted to get into some book-publishing firm and become an area rep for them from the standpoint of looking for material and that sort of thing. So I talked with Joseph Henry Jackson, again a friend of my father's, who was a book editor of the *Chronicle*. He has written books himself on California history. He suggested that I would be well off working for a couple of years in the newspaper business while I decided how I wanted to approach this.

So I took a job at the *Chronicle*; started as a copyboy under Paul Smith, who was the editor. Everybody started as a copyboy, including some people like Terry O'Flaherty, who came from a background where he had a lot of experience writing in Hollywood about radio and television and all of that.

HICKE: He started as a copyboy?

BYNUM: He was a copyboy. Art Hoppe was a copyboy. Right at the tail end of my time as a copyboy, he came on. I can name a bunch of them: Phil Foise, who was with the *Washington Post* later on, any number. All of them started as copyboys. Of course after Smith left that didn't pertain. It did for a while, but they finally realized how ludicrous it was. I mean Dave Pearlman, who had been editor of the *International Herald Tribune* in Paris, came to work at the *Chronicle*; he's not going to start as a copyboy. But that was the way it was then, and I never did get into book publishing, I just stayed there for 15 years.

HICKE: After being copyboy what did you do?

BYNUM: I was on *This World Magazine*, which had a *Time Magazine* format in those days, doing news rewrite and some special features. We did a series on the counties of California, and I did three of those I think. Then I went from that to doing various special editions. I was garden editor for a while, and I put out all sorts of special editions, whether they were to do with travel or what.

HICKE: Would they just hand you down an assignment?

BYNUM: Pretty much so, yes. I sort of gained a reputation of being able to put together special editions. Then I went to work — Scott Newhall, who was the editor of the *Chronicle*, wanted me to go to the promotion department and work on the Sunday paper, which was his big interest at the time because we lagged so far behind the Examiner.

[End Tape 1, Side B]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

BYNUM: The circulation of the *Chronicle* kept getting smaller and smaller to the point where I know Bob Sproul, Jr. ordered two

subscriptions because he was afraid the paper was going to go out of business. [laughter]

HICKE: What did you do for the Sunday edition?

BYNUM: I did promotional work, writing advertising copy for the Sunday paper and for the national and local promotions. As far as I'm concerned it was a wasted experience. I guess nothing is wasted; you shouldn't look at it that way.

HICKE: You must have learned about a lot of different things.

BYNUM: Well, I did, that's true. Then I did a lot of — Scott Newhall, they called him the P.T. Barnum of the newspaper world, had a very creative mind that was just constantly going, and he'd come up with the darndest promotions you could imagine. He got a woodsman, Bud Boyd, I think his name was, to do this thing on the last man on earth. So he was going to pack him off into the hinterland someplace with his family with nothing to eat. We sold it to newspapers all over the country, and then the *Examiner* [*San Francisco Examiner*] found that it was all fraud. [laughter]

I took my son, and a friend of his and my dad, and we went up to Tuolumne Meadows and walked into the backcountry. I came out and we drove from Tuolumne Meadows up to Tahoe so the kids could go swimming and spend the night. On the way home I stopped at Zephyr Cove and here is this huge *Examiner* headline "The Last Man a Fraud" [laughter] I started laughing, I couldn't stop. They had gone in where he was and found out that he had never filed a story from this lake where he was because he had gotten sick right away, and his whole family had gotten sick. So the old mountain man who took him in there, brought him out. First he brought supplies up to him, and food so they were strong enough to walk out. [laughter]

But they found that he hadn't filed a story until after he got back. And all these things that were supposed to be coming out of the wild, I don't know whether a carrier pigeon was going to do it. I think some guy with the packing outfit up in the Trinity Alps was going to pick up the dispatch from him. Anyway, everything like that is an experience, but generally a waste of your time and energy.

I think the thing that finished me off was Count Marco. You remember Count Marco?

HICKE: No.

BYNUM: Well, he's the guy, a nice enough guy, but he was a hairdresser, a woman's hairdresser, and he came in and sold Newhall on the idea that nobody knew a woman's secrets like a hairdresser did. And so he would write these outrageous columns, just really outrageous columns.

HICKE: Secrets of a hairdresser or something like that?

BYNUM: Yes, except Scott Newhall called him Count Marco, his name was Mark Spinelli. And of course Newhall comes out with this Spinelli business. [laughter]

MANAGING NEWSPAPERS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

BYNUM: Anyway, I left the *Chronicle* and went south. Newhall got me down there to buy a paper. Newhall's family owned the Newhall Land and Farming Company, but Scott Newhall had no interest in them anymore, or very little, because his father had sold all his shares to his aunt. When the company started to develop the property — he was on the Board of Directors of the company, Scott was, when this company started to develop this whole area

around Newhall into what is now known as Valencia, Scott wanted to participate in this, and he figured the way to do it was to buy the local newspapers.

Well, he had somebody, a big newspaper broker from Chicago, try to buy this thing and they wouldn't sell it to him. So he wanted me to go down and talk these people into selling. He said, "If you can avoid letting them know who is interested in buying it, do so." I didn't even try. I went down and said to these people, "Look, I represent Scott Newhall, not the Farming Company, not the Corporation, just Scott Newhall himself, who wants to buy this paper. Well, it turned out in the meantime that the owner had two other papers, and we had to buy all of them but...

HICKE: What year was this?

BYNUM: 1963. Then, in a weak moment, I let Newhall talk me into going down and running these things. So I went to move my family down. Neither my wife nor I could quite see ourselves in Newhall, so we rented a house in Pasadena. I had a paper in Tujunga and one in Newhall and another one in the Sun Valley area. So I just sort of drove around looking at all these things, making sure that they were getting to press, and the ad men were doing what they were supposed to do. And I wrote a column for each one of those.

HICKE: Putting out fires and so forth...

BYNUM: Yes. I had a two-year contract and at the end of nine months I said to Scott, "I just can't do this." I had to go to service club meetings all the time, all the time. I had to join the Rotary Club. I'd go to Rotary Club, and I was always missing lunches and I'd have to go make it up somewhere in Timbuktu, something like that. [laughter]

I remember one day I started — had an early breakfast around seven o'clock at the Optimist Club and to have breakfast at seven you have to be an optimist. [laughter] Then I had lunch with the Rotary Club, dinner with the Lions Club, and after dinner I had to go to the Chamber of Commerce meeting. I could do this for just so long and it just got to the point where I couldn't do it. Scott gave me 10 percent of the paper to start out with. I gave it back to him and pulled out my stakes and left, came back to Berkeley and started the winery.

IV EARLY WINE VENTURES

HOME WINEMAKING

HICKE: Before we start there could we back up to your home winemaking efforts?

BYNUM: I'd really gotten very interested in winemaking when I was just out of Cal. This was back in 1951. A friend of mine, Bill Rogers, his family owned a winery, Chateau Chevalier — up in the Napa Valley on Spring Mountain Road — which was a magnificent old building, it hadn't been used as a winery for a long time. So he and I went up there on a weekend, and his father had an old apple press and grinder, and we decided we wanted to make wine. He knew Bob Mondavi, the family knew the Mondavis.

We went down to Charles Krug, they were bringing in grapes then and there was this one truck, a big truck, which had lug boxes stacked very high. We said to Bob Mondavi, "Could we buy some of these grapes?" They were Petite Sirah, and he said, "Sure." So he said, "How many do you want?" And we said,

“One, one box.” [laughter] So he had them give us one box of grapes that weighed about 50 pounds. They were big lug boxes.

Then he had to go in and figure out how much to charge us. He came back and it was \$1.80. [laughter] He said, “Is there anything else I can do for you?” And we said, “Yes, how do you make wine?” [laughter] We went back and we crushed the grapes and made three and one-half gallons of wine. It really turned out nicely.

HICKE: What kind of equipment did you use?

BYNUM: We crushed the grapes and put them in a big glass carboy. Then when it finished fermenting, we drained that carboy into a smaller carboy and let it finish fermenting there. For some miraculous reason the wine turned out really well.

About a month later we went to Louis Martini, whom I had met, and we got five boxes, 200 pounds total, of Cabernet Sauvignon, and we made a wine out of that. It just turned out lovely, a lovely wine. We were drinking it 10 years later. I didn’t drink it that fast, but it was just really nice, so every year after that we made wine. Sometimes more than other times. Only once again did we make it up to Chateau Chevalier; the rest of the time we made it at home.

HICKE: You made it in Berkeley?

BYNUM: Oh, yes, yes.

HICKE: With what kind of equipment?

BYNUM: Well, the first year that we made white wine we really had to press it pretty hard. We just used gunnysacks. [laughter] We crushed the grapes, put them in there and then twisted the sacks, one person on one side and the other person on the other side. It

took a long time, and my arms were just dead tired at the end of the day.

HICKE: How much wine did you make of that?

BYNUM: That year we made — it was never a lot — in 1954 I know we crushed half a ton. I bought an old basket press from an Italian family, nobody in the family made wine anymore. The father had made wine and none of the family did, so I got the press.

HICKE: What kind of white grapes?

BYNUM: The first ones I made, and one reason I found out that they were so tough, they were Semillon, and they don't give up their juice very easily.

I'm trying to figure out how much we made that year. I know we were at it all day long with many different gunnysack loads. That was in '52 I believe.

HICKE: And you put that in carboys?

BYNUM: Yes. What was interesting, there was a winery out in the Bay View district in San Francisco, I think it was called Bay View Winery. They had a fellow named Italo Lembi; he was a new husband of the widow who owned the place. He was making wine in fairly large quantities. You could go out there and buy wine in fifths or in gallons or half-gallons or whatever. And he had Burgundy, Chianti, Zinfandel and Claret. All came out of the same tank. [laughter] They all came out of the same tank.

He had a whole bunch of barrels; I don't know where he got them all. Small ones, anywhere from two to five gallons, and half of them were new, and we bought those from him. You have to be very careful when you put wine in a barrel that is that

small and has such a high wine to wood ratio, because it would get woody too fast.

HICKE: Did he charge the same price for each of his “varietals”?

BYNUM: I think he did. As I recall it was all \$1.50 a gallon. A buck a bottle or something like that. [laughter] It wasn’t unusual; there were a lot of people that did that.

HICKE: Were these oak barrels?

BYNUM: Yes, these were brand-new, little oak kegs.

HICKE: From where?

BYNUM: Probably Arkansas, but they could have been from some other place too. Then he had some others that weren’t new. It was like a new barrel for \$3.00. [laughter]

I spent a lot of time, in those days, the early home winemaking days, reading literature from Davis. The university has several pamphlets on home winemaking, both in technical and lay terms. I just poured over all of the technical manuals, and absorbed them all.

HICKE: Did your father get involved?

BYNUM: No, he was not interested in making wine. He was just interested in the end product. So gradually, as the years went on, by the time I had done it 14 or 15 years, I figured I knew a little bit about what I was doing...

HICKE: Were you selling any?

BYNUM: No, no. Drunk it all, my family and I. And if I got a friend to make it with me, you know, they would get some.

THE WINERY IN ALBANY

BYNUM: So finally in '65 I made the big — I'd quit the newspaper business in '64. I left Newhall and came back up to Berkeley and started putting the winery together. Then in March of '65 we rented a place that used to be a plumbing warehouse. It had all the drains in the back, and it worked out very well. And we had our office space up front. The previous display area is what we used as a tasting room.

HICKE: This was in Albany?

BYNUM: Yes, Albany, right next to the Volkswagen used car lot. We had a Vaslin press set up in the driveway, which was the easiest place for us to do it. I thought people would stop and be interested in what was going on, but they weren't. I don't know why, I could never figure that out. The only conclusion I came to was that some people didn't care as much about making wine as I did, so...

HICKE: Could they tell if it was for winemaking?

BYNUM: Yes, they could tell.

HICKE: Was this winery bonded?

BYNUM: Oh yes. We bonded it. It was just a regular physical plant. It was as good as you needed because it all drained to the center of the floor.

HICKE: What kind of machinery did you have?

BYNUM: I had a basket press, which was hand operated, and had it for the first couple of years. I bought this little crusher/stemmer from an old winery in Martinez, motorized it, and mounted it up high.

Then we'd hand the grapes up high and crush them and they would go down a chute into the fermenting tank.

HICKE: When you say we, was there somebody else involved?

BYNUM: No, only the people working for me. So it was basic, a crusher/stemmer, a big basket press that I bought from Paul Rhodes Winery out in Castro Valley or Hayward, and it held about three tons of grapes. A beautiful thing. Boy, when the juice started flowing on that I couldn't believe it. And we had barrels, obviously, and fermenting tanks.

HICKE: Where did you get the barrels?

BYNUM: Well, the early barrels were not, I must admit, the greatest things in the world. They were for the most part barrels that had been brandy barrels, or whisky barrels that had been shaved, and I got some from Sal de Bella in San Francisco. He was a character, and for some reason he thought that I was an Italian, which was flattering as far as I was concerned. [laughter] You know I got mail addressed to Bynumini. [laughter] I never did find out if he was kidding me or not. I would write him a check for stuff and it would always say Bynum on it, you know.

When we started the winery — I started it with a totally different concept than I have now — except for the method of making wine.

My whole idea at the time was to produce a very modestly priced wine, even a jug wine, a gallon, and a half gallon, wine that was better than most of the stuff that you bought in the store. I don't just mean wine that was in gallons, but better than the bottled stuff. I think we achieved that, because we made some awfully good wine that we put in jugs. But we also bottled it, but our clientele was for the most part from the university. My wife, when we started the winery, got a whole register of

professors and assistant professors and graduate students and teaching assistants, all of them from the university. She sat there and hand addressed every one of those people about once every two months. We got more than 50 percent of our business from the university personnel.

HICKE: Would they come by or order by mail?

BYNUM: They'd come by. Then we would also sell little corks and corks so these people could take a jug of wine and re-bottle it and cork it, and they would have a bottle of wine — you paid \$4.00 for a gallon of it.

HICKE: Did you have a label?

BYNUM: Yes, we had a label, very primitive, I designed it myself. It had a little Bacchus on it and said Davis Bynum Winery.

HICKE: Do you still have one of those around? Maybe we could copy it?

BYNUM: I can find one. [see label illustrations] You know we weren't out in the marketplace. We weren't trying to make an impression on the general public; we were just trying to sell all the wine we made, and selling it at retail. I've often wondered — I know you can't continue to do that forever — but the trouble started when we started shipping wine all over the country. You have to cut everybody in and you have to raise your prices way up or you don't make any money at all. Finally my accountant said, "You know, the idea of being in business is to take in more money than you put out; you've got to stop selling these jug wines." [laughter]

So gradually we converted to what Charles Sullivan, one of the Mensa people, in his publication called "Playing the Premium Game." I told him, "I hope you didn't include us in on that," because we still weren't charging an awful lot. We didn't start

charging an awfully lot until oh, five, six years ago, 10 years ago maybe. But we didn't get our prices up to where we are now — we put out a lot of effort, soul searching, and we buy a lot of new barrels now, you know, at 600 bucks each.

HICKE: What kind of wines were you making early on? Varietals?

BYNUM: Yes, we were making varietals. Mostly I was buying just bulk wines and blending and bottling them. I'd buy from other wineries.

HICKE: What kind of wine?

BYNUM: Cabernet, a lot of Zinfandel. I'd buy things like Grignolino. I bought Pinot Noir. The first Pinot I actually crushed was in 1969, I believe. At first I had it bottled for me by another winery. Gradually we increased our crush until in 1972 we crushed 40 tons, which doesn't sound like very much, but on San Pablo Avenue it was a lot. We just outgrew our facilities, so we just started looking around for other places.

A NAPA VINEYARD

BYNUM: In '71 we bought a vineyard in the Napa Valley, which was the courtesy of my aunt who left me some money. We found a place up there to refurbish, an old winery. It was in the city limits and the city council shot us down on it; they didn't want any more...

HICKE: This was St. Helena?

BYNUM: Yes, St. Helena, right.

HICKE: They didn't want any more wineries?

BYNUM: Well, they didn't want one in town, let's put it that way. They were afraid with trucks coming — I think they envisioned something the size of a Gallo or something.

HICKE: Where was it?

BYNUM: You know where Railroad Avenue is and the Safeway shopping area is, Adams Street and Railroad Avenue. You cross the tracks and go out across an orchard there, actually it was walnuts and there was an old winery building.

HICKE: Well, it was not downtown.

BYNUM: Well, they would have to go through downtown to get out there. Basically, if you go to Adams Street and you continue north for one block there was a private driveway that went right into this place, right over the railroad tracks.

We did a lot of work on that place, because we didn't anticipate that they would shoot us down. My son was up there with Ernie Lane, who is a chemist and who did a lot of winery work, and they were re-furbishing the place, getting it ready to go and bang, we got turned down.

At that point I started looking elsewhere, and we talked about doing something on our vineyard, which was at the corner of Whitehall Lane and Highway 29. It's now Whitehall Lane Vineyard and Winery. The thing there that killed us was the requirement for an Environmental Impact Report, an EIR. It was going to cost me something like \$5,000; boy in those days it was like \$100,000 is to me now. It was just impossible to come up with just on the spur of the moment like that. So that's when a friend of mine, Howard Allen, who two years before had bought a ranch right down here on Westside Road — he had been a friend and his wife, Ann, was a friend of my wife, and I had known her too in college — called and said, "Come up for

dinner, I want to show you this country up here and let you taste some of the wines that I made at home.”

[End Tape 2, Side A]

[Begin Tape 2, Side B]

BYNUM: His property is adjacent to Joe Rochioli's, who is another neighbor of ours, who is a grower of some repute and also he and his son built a winery on the property. But Joe was taking care of Howie Allen's vineyard, which they planted in 1971, I believe. So Howie was a winemaker and he had made some wine from some of Joe's grapes and he wanted me to taste them. When I tasted them I was struck by the incredible character they seemed to have, intense character. I think that's typical of this area out here, but I didn't know it at the time.

HICKE: What were the grapes?

BYNUM: That was Gamay. He poured me a couple of vintages, and they were very good. They were well made, but the character of the fruit was just dominant. It was a wonderful experience. So that was in November of '72, right after we had a harvest over in Napa Valley. It rained so much that year, we tried crushing in the field and we were digging our truck out more than otherwise.

HICKE: You were actually growing grapes on your property there?

BYNUM: Yes, yes. In '71 we bought that vineyard. I crushed some of the grapes myself. That's where most of the 40 tons that we crushed came from. I also sold some to Mondavi, and I sold some to Rod Strong at Sonoma Vineyards. And I sold to Allied Growers. I was a member of Allied.

HICKE: Let me interrupt again and ask: how did your vineyard property in Napa Valley compare to Sonoma County?

BYNUM: Well, I bought it for \$4,000 an acre.

HICKE: In Napa?

BYNUM: In Napa in '71. By '73 when I put it in our winery corporation, we incorporated at that point in order to acquire this property, I had it appraised and it was \$8,000 an acre. So that's what it went into the corporation for, and about two years later when we decided to sell it, there'd been a surplus of grapes, and the price had gone back down to \$4,000 an acre, \$4,500 an acre. Now it's worth \$100,000-plus an acre. It was right on Highway 29. But that's neither here nor there.

Then we bought this property over here, and we got 82 acres, with the houses on it, albeit not much in the way of houses, but with this building on it.

HICKE: But no vineyards?

BYNUM: No vineyards, the houses, the main building and the warehouse. It cost us a total of \$115,000 for 82 acres. So that was about \$1,400 an acre.

SELLING FUTURES

HICKE: Can I interrupt again?

BYNUM: Sure.

HICKE: I read that you had one of the early futures programs in Albany...

BYNUM: I did as a matter of fact, and that was something that we started because we were trying to figure out — this was in 1966 — we want this many Cabernet grapes and how are we going to pay for these things? I didn't have bank financing at that time, and so we came up with the idea of selling futures.

HICKE: Was anybody else doing it at that time?

BYNUM: No, no they didn't do it for a long time.

HICKE: You just "invented" it...

BYNUM: Yes, we came up here and were doing it; we'd have one of these barrel-tasting weekends and sell futures. Other wineries found out about it and they all started doing it too. I remember a few years ago when Mondavi started selling some futures, they made a big thing about the fact that they were the first winery in California to do it; it was common in Europe. Well, Channel 50 came out and got all the information from us on our futures program and when it started. That night they reported the story about Mondavi and said they thought they would come out to Davis Bynum who has been doing futures since 1966. [laughter]

We still do it. We don't do it as much as we used to, but we have it on our own Merlot up here on the hill. The first year we kept it separate and bottled, it was in 1989, and after we had the harvest in and knew it was going to be OK, we sent out notices that we were selling a limited number of futures — I think it was 250 or something like that — on our estate Merlot, and we were keeping it separate from all the other Merlot we were making. Here was a chance for people to get in on the ground floor of something, and we sold out whatever it was that we had in a month's time. Then every year — we've done that since 1989 — and every year we have what we call our Merlot pick-up party. So when the wine's ready, we send out a notice to the people to come and pick up their wine. They can stay and have a

dinner courtesy of the winery. Not everybody does that because some are not able to, but we ship those.

HICKE: In 1966 was the futures program a success?

BYNUM: Oh, yes. We had a mailing list with quite a few names on it.

HICKE: How did you publicize that?

BYNUM: Through the mail. Well, we had the mailing list and...

HICKE: Did your wife write to everybody again?

BYNUM: Yes, she did. At that time we had a mailing list of people who had been buying wine at the winery, so we just solicited all of them and had no trouble at all.

HICKE: What wine were you selling?

BYNUM: Cabernet.

HICKE: And for how much?

BYNUM: Thirteen dollars a case! [laughter] The grapes were costing me, I think, \$275 a ton. We didn't make a big profit but we made enough to pay for the grapes, which we used then to bottle our regular Cabernet.

I remember — I think that the Petite Sirah that we bought in 1951 from Mondavi was \$80 a ton maybe, or \$75 a ton, and the Cabernet that I bought two, three weeks later from Louis Martini I think was \$220 a ton. Then it didn't go up that much for a long time, it really didn't.

HICKE: Were the Martini grapes from Napa?

BYNUM: I think they were from Sonoma County, from the Monte Rosso Vineyard up on the hill, maybe not, they may have been from Napa Valley. But so many of Martini's vineyards were in Sonoma County. He has a big 200-acre vineyard here on Westside Road, down by the Bishop's Ranch. It's across the road from Bishop's Ranch. Then he had the Monte Rosso Vineyard, up on the hill between the two valleys, and that was in Sonoma County.

OTHER VENTURES

The Compleat Winemaker

HICKE: Back in the early '60s you started the *Compleat Winemaker*, can you expand on it?

BYNUM: Bob Ellsworth, who was a wine chemist and a former winemaker, I think at Mayacamas Vineyard, approached me when we were down in Albany about starting this home winemaking supply business. And we called it the *Compleat Winemaker*. We had all the equipment down there in our tasting room for sale, presses and crushers and all the necessary chemicals that you had to have to make wine, bentonite, metabisulfide, etc.

We also had grapes that Bob lined up. They were packed — well, the first year I think they came down in load boxes — and people came down and picked up their grapes. That went on for a couple of years. Then Bob moved to the Napa Valley and he bought me out, bought my share out, so I was only involved with that for a couple of years.

HICKE: Did that fly?

BYNUM: Oh yes, oh yes. He sold the business about two years ago, but it's now a winery supply business. Home winemakers can buy things there, but his big business is selling crushers and presses and all that to the wine industry. I guess he is basically retired now, maybe consulting.

HICKE: Did you sell that because it was too much?

BYNUM: Well, he couldn't very well be up in Napa Valley and have any help from me in Albany because I didn't have — it was fine, it wasn't a big deal. But I was concerned at the time — we continued to sell some home winemaking supplies — that was a losing proposition because you had people coming in and they'd want a whole course on how to make wine. It was just not a good deal, not a good deal.

Barefoot Bynum

HICKE: I wanted to ask you about the Barefoot Bynum label. Did that start back in Albany?

BYNUM: Actually it was my home winemaking label. And the name — when my dad retired all his friends at the university kidded him about moving to the Napa Valley. They started thinking about names he could put out, and Barefoot Bynum was one of them. I think it was Barefoot Bynum's Beautiful Burgundy that they suggested to him. [laughter] So I just had a label, Barefoot Bynum, and a friend of mine, who was an artist, a graphic artist at the *Chronicle*, did the label for me.

HICKE: It was a bare foot as I recall...

BYNUM: It was a bare foot. And we did that, it became — I was really reluctant at first to do it — I can remember labeling some wine

and putting it out on the shelf and looking at it. I couldn't stand it so I took it off and put it back in again, then someone came in and I put it out because everybody urged me to, and someone came in and said, "Oh my god, I've got to have some of that." So it became sort of a tail-wagging-the-dog proposition. It distracted us completely from what we really wanted to do.

HICKE: What was the difference between the Barefoot label and the...

BYNUM: Barefoot was an inexpensive jug wine, and you just can't — especially when you are shipping it out of the state or out of the area and cutting in wholesalers — you just have to produce a tremendous amount of it, which we didn't have the capacity to do.

HICKE: Did you ship it all around?

BYNUM: We shipped it to a few places. We shipped some to Texas, a lot to Colorado, some to Vermont. About 800 cases went to Vermont in one shipment. It was not a good thing to have done. I mean it was fun, and it was a joke. And we stopped doing it — after we moved up here we did it for maybe a year or two, and then we stopped and we didn't do it again. We resurrected a 17th Anniversary bottling in fifths only of it. And that was just only mildly successful.

Then we didn't do it anymore. In 1985 or '86 my son and another person wanted to resurrect the label and pay me so much per case for selling it. Well, I did that for a while, but my son dropped out of that, it was distracting him, and finally this other fellow bought the label from us, and they're making 250,000 cases a year of it now, I think. A lot, and doing very well. They have Barefoot this and Barefoot that. I'm glad they have it and I don't. It's taken me a long, long time to live that label down.

There are still people, when you go to a tasting out of state someplace, who say, “Oh, Barefoot Bynum.” And, of course, the connotation was not favorable in view of the fact that we were trying to make some really premium wines. So it was fun while it lasted. It should have never gone beyond the store in Albany. It really shouldn’t have. Then it would have been OK. We put out some pretty good wines. We put out some Zinfandel; we put out a blend of red wines, a decent white wine.

HICKE: I don’t know if you do or not, but a lot of the wineries have a second label, but probably this doesn’t quite fit...

BYNUM: We have a second label, but I don’t want Barefoot on it. We sold the label anyway.

HICKE: But I’m wondering, this doesn’t seem to fit in the category of a second label.

BYNUM: It doesn’t. We have a second label called River Bend, which was the name of our ranch when we bought it, and that works. We have a couple of wines, or one wine anyway, down in the tasting room which we sell there, and outside, under the River Bend label.

HICKE: It was the “Barefoot” idea that you didn’t like, and not a second label, right?

BYNUM: It was the Barefoot idea that drags you down. I don’t care how — I think I could take a bottle of Château Lafite, and put a Barefoot label on it and put a Château Lafite label on a bottle of Barefoot, and pour those wines for some of the snobbier people, and they’d chose the wine with the Lafite label on it. [laughter]

It took a long time to live it down. I think we finally have done that. I know that Daryl Groom, who was the winemaker up at

Geyser Peak, told me once that it took them a long time to live down the “wine in a box” image that Geyser Peak had.

WINE BUSINESS IN THE 1960S

HICKE: Well, we’re still in the ‘60s. Before we get too much farther, can you tell me what else was going on in the wine business in the ‘60s?

BYNUM: Yes, the wine business in the ‘60s was relatively small. You had the big wineries, like Almaden, and you had your smaller, family wineries, and I think for the most part in the ‘60s, there was a much friendlier atmosphere. For the most part, the winery owners were families who had been in the wine business. They were involved in the making of the wine and the selling of the wine and the whole thing. Whereas now I think the corporate image is what you think of when you think of the wine business. I dealt with a lot of Italian families back in the ‘60s...

HICKE: Grape growers?

BYNUM: And winery people. I was buying bulk wine. Without exception they were friendly; they were totally immersed in the whole concept of wine, and they weren’t trying to put out a label, so to speak, but they were just putting out good, drinkable wine. Some of it wasn’t too good and drinkable, but most of it was a very drinkable wine. I can think of one winery in particular that I was buying bulk wine from, and they wouldn’t let me leave without serving me lunch, usually a hot lunch, a good-sized lunch, and plenty of wine to go with it.

HICKE: Do you want to say who these people were?

BYNUM: I could. It's the Viano Winery in Martinez. I also used to buy bulk wine from the Pedroncellis, from Louis Martini and August Sebastiani. Sebastiani is now huge, and it was getting pretty big then, but still a relatively small, family operation. He helped me a lot, August Sebastiani, helped me a lot, yes.

HICKE: After you moved up here or when you were in Albany?

BYNUM: Both, but mostly when I was in Albany.

HICKE: Can you give me some examples?

BYNUM: Well, he'd sell me wine and I'd have trouble paying him on time. I remember one time when I owed him \$1,500, or something like that; I had a collection of Indian baskets. August had a collection of Indian baskets and other Indian artifacts, which he had on display over there and which he really liked. He wanted to buy my collection of Indian baskets. So we negotiated, and I didn't sell all of them, but I sold a good number of them to him. He didn't require that I use those Indian baskets to credit my account with him because he knew I needed the money. He got paid off and everything, but it took longer than I would have liked.

You know when I got started in this thing I didn't have much money to start with, and I went broke in a hurry. And to have somebody like that, who would overlook \$1,500 when he could just as well have said, "Well, I'll take the baskets in exchange for that." But I needed the money from the baskets just to keep going. Those were years, I don't like to look back on them because there was a lot of deprivation, for my wife, and for my kids, and we tried to maintain a normal life and I think we did. I think we did, except obviously we curtailed our expenditures tremendously. We didn't travel. We didn't do a lot except just survive, so to speak.

HICKE: Tell me about your children, please.

BYNUM: Well, I have two. Hampton is three years older than my daughter. They both work here at the winery.

HICKE: Your daughter's name is...

BYNUM: Susan.

HICKE: And they both work here. I think that says a lot for their growing up...

BYNUM: Yes, there were times when it was a little rough, but most of the time it wasn't. They both liked the business, and Hampton does an awful lot of the administration of the winery. He's doing a lot of the things that I used to have to do.

Susan handles all of our inventory control and invoicing, the shipping and all of that. Then she helps with wine tastings if we have to go out to public wine tastings. She's very good at that.

And Hamp — I was the winemaker for starters, and then Hampton was the winemaker here. In '78 Hampton left because he wanted to do his own thing, which he did for a while. That's when Gary Farrell, who had been working for us for five years as a "cellar rat", had learned a lot about winemaking, and had taken courses at Davis, and so he started with the title, so to speak. I've always worked closely with anybody who's a winemaker, just because I want to try to make sure that we maintain a certain style, which I think we have all the way through.

HICKE: I think what you're saying is that back in the '60s, marketing was not a big thing, is that correct?

BYNUM: Wine wasn't a big thing. Everybody basically was selling all the wine that they made in the '60s. And it wasn't until wine got to be a big financial investment, when they were planting vineyards all over the place — they're still planting them. I can't believe what's being done, the intensity of this whole thing increased so you're fighting for shelf space with people. You're fighting for a place on the wine list at restaurants. You're friendly with your neighbors, but you'd just as soon they disappeared when it comes to selling wine to the same people. I liked it a lot more then than I think I like it now.

HICKE: The atmosphere...

BYNUM: Yes. It was just different, it was different. Now our whole focus is on selling wine to restaurants. We made a decision about five years ago that we wanted to focus on restaurants rather than wine retail shops. And we have been very successful. That's the good news, and the bad news is that since September 11th, restaurant sales have been way down, but they're coming back.²

[End Tape 2, Side B]

[Begin Tape 3, Side A]

COLLEAGUES IN THE WINE BUSINESS

HICKE: You've mentioned August Sebastiani. Are there any others, or is this the right time frame — should we put that off for a bit?

BYNUM: Sure, that's fine. Well, André Tchelistcheff: I never had any direct dealings with him in a commercial sense, or in a professional sense. I had known him for a long time since I was

² Refers to the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington in hijacked airplanes.

a wine judge at the State Fair and he was a friend of my father's, and a gentleman of the old school I must say.

HICKE: Do you have any Tchelistcheff stories?

BYNUM: Well, oh boy, no. The only thing I can remember is when I introduced him to my wife, he clicked his heels, bowed and kissed her hand. [laughter] She was taken aback with that, pretty impressed.

August Sebastiani — I've told you about him already. Lee Stewart — Lee was a friend of my dad's and he had the old Souverain Winery up on Howell Mountain, and he was very helpful to me. He gave me clues now and then on the best ways to handle certain things in making wine and how he did it. Both he and his wife, Glen, were friends of my dad and my stepmother. They used to go on trips together like they would do Christmas at the Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite National Park for a couple of years. Then they would go up to Little River Inn and that sort of thing. One story I can think of: Lee was — Lee was a little bit of a tightwad, and he would have his wife cut his hair for him. Then every time she would cut his hair, he would put a dollar or two in a jar, but she never got the benefit of the money in the jar. [laughter]

She didn't drive so she was stuck up there on the mountain. So my stepmother used to go pick her up and take her to have her hair done, run errands and do things with her. But they still were good friends, and I remember that Lee, when he sold his winery, he always wanted to live — Lee was a person who was never really happy where he was. When he was up on the hill, they were making really good wines at Souverain, and he was always talking about the Alexander Valley and how that was the place he wanted to go to make wine.

He was always talking about wanting to live up on the Mendocino Coast too. So he had sold his winery, Glen had passed away, so he went up there and bought a house, and I kept in touch with him. When was it? — I guess he had been up there for a year and a half or so, and he sold the place and moved to Santa Rosa. And I said to him, “How come?” And he said, “Well, you know, I always thought I wanted to live up there, but when I got up there, I got to the point where it became a big event for me when the garbage people came to pick up my garbage so I could have someone to talk to.” [laughter]

So Lee pulled up stakes and moved back to Santa Rosa. I think he re-married, but I’m not sure. He was from Fresno originally. But he gave me a lot of tips on making wine. He also had some Zinfandel up there on the hill, and he called me once and said, “Do you want any second crop Zinfandel?” And I said, “Sure.” I got almost five tons. It was a tremendous second crop, and he wouldn’t let me pay for them. He said, “I wouldn’t have asked you to pay for them, I just wondered if you wanted them.” Well, I got a couple of guys to pick them for me, and they made a really nice wine.

HICKE: Did you give him a bottle?

BYNUM: I forget whether I did or not. [laughter] I might have sold him one but... So you know, here is a person who has a reputation of being very tight-fisted, and yet there is a heart there.

Herman Wente was another old friend of my dad’s. There were three brothers, Herman, Ernest and Carl. Ernest was a farmer, Herman was a winemaker and bon vivant, and Carl was the banker. But Herman Wente — I remember taking Hamp out there; I was buying some grapes from him when I was a home winemaker, and I took Hamp out. I used to go out with a trailer loaded with lug boxes. And we always used to weigh in first to get the weight of the empty trailer and then weigh out again

when you were full. Hamp was only about three or four years old, and as we picked grapes he must have eaten quite a few, and Herman Wente, when we left, said, "Wow, I should have weighed that kid on the way in and out with the boxes." [laughter] But I always enjoyed him; he was a very nice person, an interesting person.

I had lunch out there once with him and a couple of other people, I forget who they all were — I know, one of them was the son-in-law of Chaffee Hall of Hallcrest Vineyards down in Fulton. But Herman sold us those grapes to make wine. He also sold us bulk wine. Never after I started the winery, however, did I deal with him, because I was oriented more toward the north. Also, he sold us some barrels of juice, which we then fermented. That was Sauvignon Blanc.

Louis Martini — I had a lot of dealings with him when I was first in the wine business. I had met him prior to that — I first met his father who was quite old at the time, so I bought grapes from Louis Martini when I was a home winemaker. After I was in the business, I bought bulk wine from him. He was always a very, very decent person to deal with.

I don't know what else I can tell you about them. I had minimal experience dealing with them. I had known them all for years, those who were still alive. Looking at this list, there aren't any.

HICKE: Are there any other people whom you had experience with in the industry?

BYNUM: I have an interesting story about Al Brounstein. Do you know Al up at Diamond Creek?

HICKE: Yes.

BYNUM: You know he had a cosmetics business, which I guess he sold. That's when he bought the Diamond Creek property. But while he was doing that, and getting ready, he was working for Sebastiani, selling. And Sebastiani found out that he was starting his own winery, so he fired him. [laughter] He said that he didn't want anybody competing with him, meeting all his customers and then taking them away.

Al Brounstein started selling some wine for a few little wineries, including us. That lasted for about a year, I guess; then he got into his own production and started selling wine for outrageous prices. I mean, I couldn't believe at the time. Now they don't seem that much to me anymore at all.

HICKE: Around \$100 a bottle?

BYNUM: That's now. Back then he was selling futures at \$150 a case. That was in '74 I guess. I saw him a couple of years ago, and he looked at me and probably thought, "He's aged." I looked at him and thought, "He's aged." So I don't know what condition he's in now.

The other people who I really liked were the Pedroncellis.

HICKE: John and Jim?

BYNUM: John and Jim, yes. I used to buy wine from them, and they were just really decent people. I don't see much of them anymore; I see more of Jim than John. The last time we saw each other we promised we'd get together for lunch, but we haven't done it yet. You know, it is one of those things — sometime I'm going to have to take the bull by the horns, or he's going to have to, and set a date. But I admire them, I really do. I think they have a lot of integrity and they make good wine. They don't charge a lot of money for it.

HICKE: You said you bought grapes from them?

BYNUM: No, I bought bulk wine. The other family I described, the Vianos down in Martinez, very generous people. They really live the life — he's got two sons now making wine and running the vineyard. They're right in the middle of Martinez, and have about 100 acres of vines with development all around them. They could sell it for huge amounts of money. The kids don't want to. Clem would, the father, he would.

HICKE: Clem?

BYNUM: Yes, Clem — Clement. And his father was Conrad, who started the whole thing right after Prohibition.

HICKE: Did you buy wine or grapes from them?

BYNUM: I bought wine, and after a while I bought some grapes from them. But you couldn't get away from there, as I said, without being royally treated. I see them still. They were up here and we had lunch about two months ago, I guess, just before I left for my trip.

So other than that, I dealt with — back in the days when I was buying mostly bulk wine — more of what I sold as wine I was buying in bulk and blending and bottling rather than crushing. But I dealt with a lot of people.

One memorable person to deal with was Joe Heitz. I remember when Joe got out of teaching in the Department of Enology down at Fresno State and came back. He had been an assistant to André Tchelistcheff at Beaulieu, and then he went down to Fresno State to help set up their Enology Department. Then he came back and said, "Oh I love this place."

There was this guy, Leon Brendel was his name; he had a place called Only One, and all he made was Grignolino. He was right on the highway there, Highway 29. He was a Canadian I think, a doctor or dentist, who had come down here, and he was just nuts about the Grignolino grape. That's all he planted and that's all he made. He had only about seven acres there. He made all the wine and sold it right there at the winery. He and Joe Heitz became friends, I guess, and Joe ended up buying his place. I heard stories that he practically gave it to Joe, just to keep the place going. He was quite old at the time.

That's where Joe started and has his winery right now on the little seven acres. Then he and a group, mostly doctors, I think, bought the place farther back up, off the Silverado Trail. But I bought bulk wine from Joe, and we always used to — he would always pour me some wine, and we would talk for about an hour. He was an interesting guy to talk to. A lot of people didn't get along with Joe. My dad had written the copy for his first brochure when he started his winery, so I guess he had some feelings about that. I can't think of others...

HICKE: Joe Phelps?

BYNUM: No, I didn't know Joe Phelps, and I never dealt with him. There was a time when I knew somebody in 90 percent of the wineries in California. I think now if I knew 1 percent of the wineries in California I'd be doing pretty well.

HICKE: Was there anybody else around Albany or Berkeley who was making wine?

BYNUM: There was a little old guy from Hungary named Bankuty, John Bankuty, and he shortened his name to John Bank. He had a place called the Oak Barrel. He wasn't making wine, but he was buying bulk wine and bottling it. He did very well doing that.

HICKE: Was that in Berkeley?

BYNUM: Yes. Then he built a place on University Avenue that was much enlarged over what he had before. He put tanks in and it made it a lot easier than barrels to bottle his wine from. Then he sold that place, and it's now one of my favorite bookstores. Serendipity Books, do you know them?

HICKE: No, I don't.

BYNUM: An absolutely incredible book store. Everything is first edition, and he must have 15,000 volumes of first editions in there. Just amazing. Peter Howard is his name, and it's in the old winery building that John Bank had. And a long time after they stopped bottling wine, they started selling home winemaking equipment. He was the only one who was there at that time.

Subsequently there was a guy named Peter Bren who started a thing called Wine and the People on University Avenue. He did a lot of — he sold some of his own bottles — he also sold grapes to home winemakers and some home winemaking equipment. That's about it in Berkeley. I know there are some other places now, but I don't know them.

HICKE: Yes, I just meant when you were there, your competition.

BYNUM: One of the Fretters had a place there, I think it was in Berkeley. One thing I really used to concentrate on in Berkeley, because it was hugely popular at the university, was sherry and port. I used to get some wonderful, wonderful sherries and port from two places; Eastside Winery in Lodi, and the Bear Creek Winery, which was part of the Guild operation. They were in Lodi also. I got these very old sherries from Eastside, and some very old and young Tinto Madera Port from Bear Creek. They were quite good.

HICKE: Did you bottle those?

BYNUM: Yes we did, blend them and bottle them. Also Dino Barengo out in Acampo; did you ever come across Dino Barengo vinegar?

HICKE: I don't believe so.

BYNUM: Well, he also had a winery out there, and he loved to monkey around with flavors. His layout had all these different flavors. I remember he was a bon vivant; he was a great guy. He was way in debt, and August Sebastiani, who also liked Dino, told me, "You know, Bynum," he always called me Bynum, never Dave or Davis, always Bynum, he said, "You know, Bynum, Dino Barengo is a great guy and he is never, ever going to get out of debt; he must owe me something like \$500,000." Then Dino turned around and sold his place for enough not only to get him out of debt, but for him to retire and have a good life; he moved to Reno. I thought that was just the greatest story.

But there were a lot of good people in the wine business. There still are! It's just that I don't know of them.

FROM DIVERSITY TO MONOCULTURE

BYNUM: One of the things I really don't like — one of the things I liked of Napa and Sonoma County was the diversity. You'd go to Napa and you'd see almost as many walnut orchards, and a lot of little truck farms around, a lot of roadside farmers who turned out wonderful produce at very minimal prices. Then just suddenly everything is gone. The walnut trees are all gone, everything's grapes.

And up here the apple trees — that used to be such a beautiful drive from Sebastopol to Forestville when all the apple trees

were in bloom. I don't think there is a more beautiful sight in the world than an orchard of apple in bloom. They're not all gone, but mostly gone. It's just terrible, it's terrible. And I think that is another example of a way of life that's disappeared, because everything now is grapes, most of it corporate, though not all of it, and gone are those family orchards, the family farms, the apple trees, the walnuts, the prunes. It's sad, too bad. You have a monoculture now

HICKE: Yes, and I believe that's a problem in many ways.

BYNUM: Yes, that's one reason we planted this little three-and-a-half acre piece up on the hill with all the different food crops that we need. It's only two years old, but when everything's finally developed, we'll have about 20 different food crops. Now we'll see if we can make it pay. Right now it's just been money going out. But I think it will. We have a lot of unusual things that you won't see in the normal food chain grocery.

[Interview 2: December 5, 2001]

[Tape 3, Side A, continued]

MORE ON THE BYNUM FAMILY

HICKE: This is Interview Number 2 on December 5th, 2001 and you just indicated that you wanted to fill in a few gaps from yesterday.

BYNUM: I was just thinking about the Bynums and their local connection. My grandfather basically grew up in Lake County. He was born in Yolo County, but he went to Christian College in Santa Rosa, which for years and years was out at the end of College Avenue in Santa Rosa. It later became Ursuline College for Women, or high school. But my grandmother was born in Santa Rosa; she

was born in the 1860s. Some of her brothers and sisters were born in the late '50s.

HICKE: You said your family came...

BYNUM: They came — that was the McGee family — they came to Santa Rosa and they bought and lived in the first house that was built in this area under American rule. They didn't build it, but bought it when it was six years old. Then they sold it, and moved to Geyserville, where my great-grandfather had a general store. I even have a picture of it here, I think. He owned a general store and he also had, I understand, a mercury mine. Then they sold the general store and moved to Lake County, and my wife said to me, "My god, they got worse off all the time."
[laughter]

[Refers to picture] The cat jumping down there, the rifle...

HICKE: [Still referring to picture] The horses and the carriages. Is this your great-grandfather standing here with the rifle?

BYNUM: No, he's sitting I think. No, he is standing there. My great-grandmother would be here and that would be him leaning on the post.

You know, there was a store up in Geyserville owned by a guy named Bosworth, who was older than the hills when we first came up here. I think his son may still have it. But it looks so much like that building. [refers to picture] Hampton took a picture up to him, and he said, "No, it's not the same building."

HICKE: Is it right on the main street?

BYNUM: Right. So I came across this after my aunt died; it was in her drawer. I had some copies made originally, but I can't find the negatives. So anyway, that was just a little sidebar to the whole

thing. Then they moved away to Lake County, where they met the Bynums. My grandfather and grandmother eloped; I think he was about 10 years older than she was.

HICKE: Where did they get married?

BYNUM: In Lake County. They got married there and lived there for a brief while. And my aunt was born in Lake County, but then they moved to Los Angeles. I think he took a job with W.P. Fuller Company as an accountant.

[End Tape 3, Side A]

[Begin Tape 3, Side B]

BYNUM: So that is just a little bit of fill-in which I forgot to tell you about yesterday when we were talking about family history. Now we're all set to go on.



WINERY PRINCIPALS:

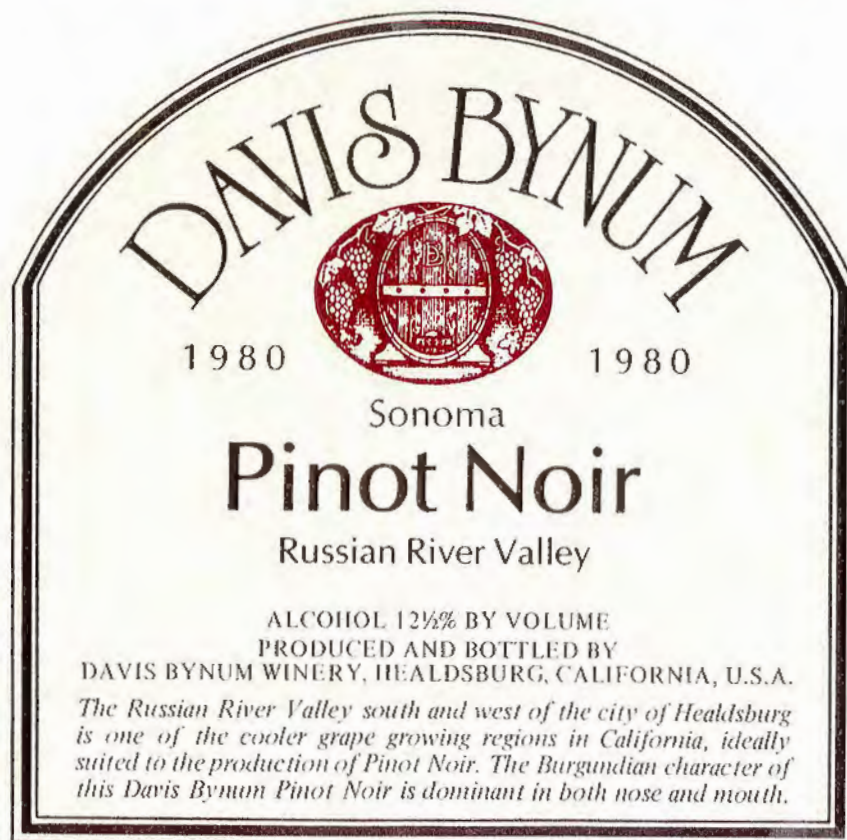
Hampton Bynum, Vice-President

Susan Bynum, Treasurer

Davis Bynum, President

2002

HISTORICAL LABELS



Davis Bynum

LIMITED RELEASE



"BEGONIAS" BY DOROTHY BYNUM

1984

Pinot Noir

RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY

PRODUCED AND BOTTLED BY DAVIS BYNUM WINERY
HEALDSBURG, SONOMA COUNTY, CA ALC. 13.3 BY VOL., CONTAINS SULFITES

RESERVE BOTTLING

DAVIS BYNUM



1985

Sonoma County

PINOT NOIR

Made & Bottled By Davis Bynum Winery
HEALDSBURG, SONOMA COUNTY, CA. ALC. 13.0% BY VOL. CONTAINS SULFITES

Flower Labels from paintings by Dorothy Bynum



Dorothy Bynum ©1988

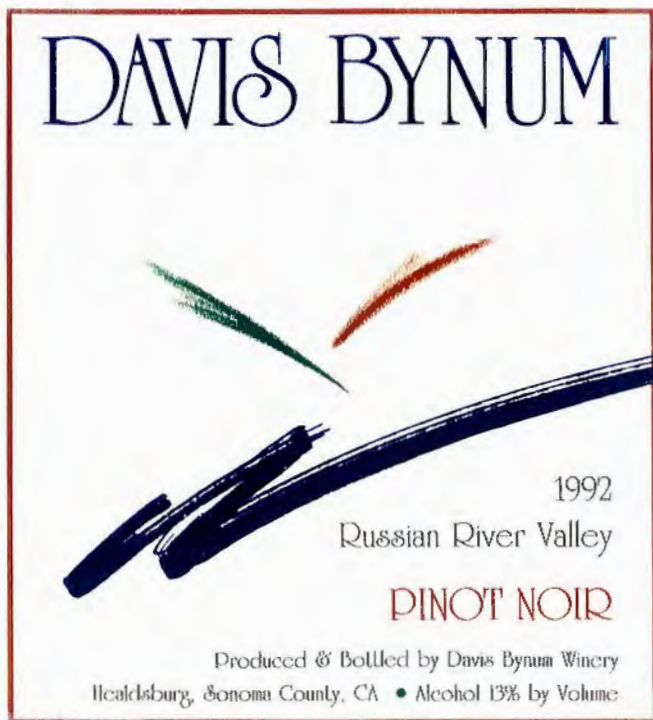
RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY

Pinot Noir

1986 LIMITED RELEASE

Produced and Bottled by Davis Bynum Winery
Healdsburg, Sonoma Co., CA Alc. 13.1% by Vol. Contains Sulfites

DAVIS BYNUM



DAVIS
BYNUM



1997

RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY

PINOT NOIR

ALC. 13.8% BY VOL.

DAVIS
BYNUM

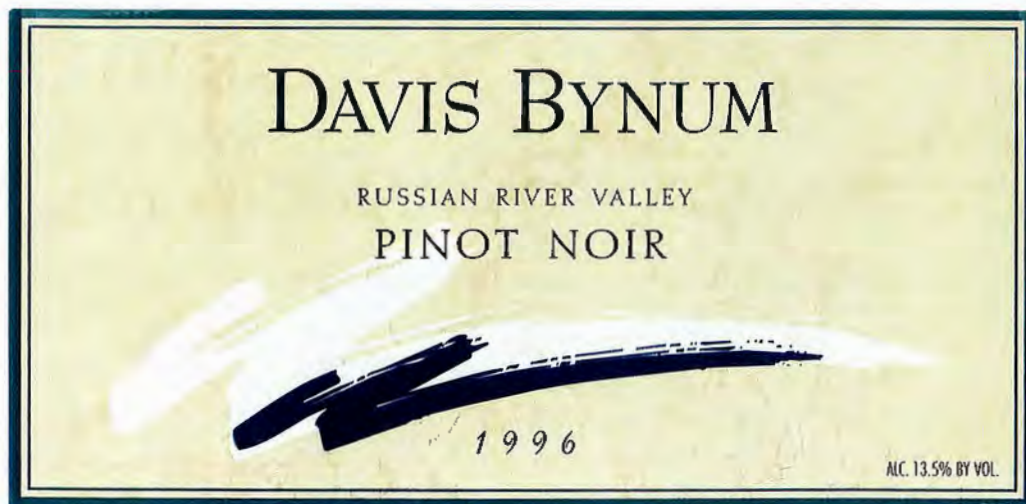


1999

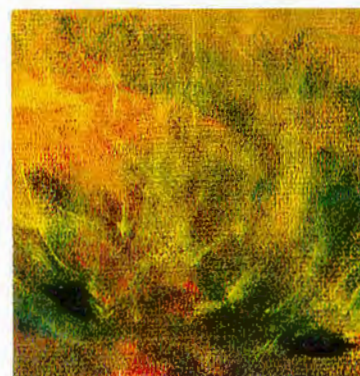
RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY

PINOT NOIR

ALC. 13.9% BY VOL.



DAVIS
BYNUM



2000

RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY

PINOT NOIR

ALC. 13.9% BY VOL.

Parts of "Westside Road"
painting by Dorothy Bynum
on labels from '97, '99, '00

V THE WINERY IN THE RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY

PURCHASING RIVER BEND RANCH

HICKE: We got you up to the point where you were looking around in Sonoma County for properties.

BYNUM: Right, and Dorothy, my wife, and I came up to spend a Sunday with our friends, the Allens. They actually lived in Marin County but he had just bought this place — he was very interested in grapes, and farming, and winemaking. He bought this ranch right next door to Joe Rochioli, and Rochioli farmed it for him, but he wanted me to come up and turn my back on our Napa place, and see what the grapes were like around here. Well, I was very much impressed by what I tasted.

HICKE: Could you elaborate on that please? What impressed you?

BYNUM: Well, what impressed me was the intensity of the varietals character. The wines that he made were not professionally made, but they were good. I thought the character of the grapes themselves, and the wine, certainly bore some looking into. So I was thinking about all of that, and lo and behold, about a month

after that a real estate man, from up here in Healdsburg, called me and said that he understood from a mutual friend that I was looking for a place up around this area. He thought he had something that I would be interested in.

So Dorothy and I came up, and I think Hampton was with us the first day also, and we came out and saw River Bend Ranch. It had been a ranch originally — there were about 82 acres above the road and 78 acres below the road. The people that bought it just wanted the part down in the bottomland to plant grapes, so they wanted to sell off the upper part. So that's what was available. We saw it and we took out a second mortgage on our place in St. Helena, and used it to acquire this place.

HICKE: Was this planted?

BYNUM: No. The group who had just bought it from the original owner were in the process of planting everything down below the road, but up here was just ranchland. They used most of the area for grazing cattle, and it wasn't until about 1984, 11 years later, that I first planted anything up here for the simple reason that I couldn't afford to sooner.

HICKE: Can you tell me about the soil and climate characteristics of this property?

BYNUM: The climate is what they call a Region 1; it's one of your coolest growing districts. It is the coolest, which is very good for a long ripening of the grapes. It builds up a lot of character, varietal character, and substance, and it doesn't lose its acidity while its hanging on the vine until very late in the game. So the whole time its ripening — one of the problems with growing grapes in a climate that is too hot is that they end up not having much natural acid, and you have to make a lot of acid adjustments to it. Also in hot climates the flavor has less time to assert itself.

HICKE: When you say it's cooler, is it the result of morning and evening fog?

BYNUM: Yes, and the influence of the ocean, which is not that far away.

HICKE: And the river?

BYNUM: And the river. The fog comes up — actually it's an interesting thing. I've noticed the fog comes in over Sebastopol, and then works its way over here rather than up the river. But that's my own observation, and I don't know if a climatologist would tell you that or not.

HICKE: Does it have to do with the prevailing winds or the air currents?

BYNUM: I think there is — I call it the Bodega Gap, where the fog comes in from Bodega and heads up over to the Sebastopol, Cotati area. That's where you see it first. You actually see the fog when you look over toward Bennett Valley, where Matanzas Creek is, and Sonoma Mountain. You see the fog come in there first. Then it works its way over here. But that influence makes for a very high-quality grape.

Now as far as the soil is concerned, on our hill, where we planted the vineyard, it's what they call a Sobrante soil. Sobrante soil is basically former river bottom soil which has been raised in an upthrust.

You can go up on our hill, and where there's any washing of the basic topsoil right below it, in fact exposed are all these little, round pebbles, all different colors. It's quite amazing. When I saw it at first, I said, "That's river rock!" And here we are on top of a hill. But it's not terribly rich — Sobrante soil is not a terribly rich soil. It does have a lot of rock and gravel in it. It doesn't have a very deep loam, but I think the interesting thing to me is — and I just discovered it this last week — this fellow

who has been doing some work for us was studying soil maps, and he said, “Your vineyard is the only vineyard in this area that has Sobrante soil.” So theoretically, that should give us some individual characteristics, which we feel our wines do have. At least the wines that we make off that area.

HICKE: Was that just serendipity?

BYNUM: Yes — I didn’t know anything about that when we bought this place.

JOE ROCHIOLI’S VINEYARD

BYNUM: I didn’t even know when we bought this place that it was going to be such an ideal location for Pinot Noir. It wasn’t until the first year that we crushed grapes here, in 1973, that we were getting several grapes from Rochioli Vineyards down the road. Joe had been selling his Pinot Noir to I think it was Martini & Prati. I think the Pinot went into their mixed black crushing tank, the black grapes as opposed to the white grapes. He was only getting something like \$150 a ton I think for it at that time. And Hampton said, “Hey, wait a minute, we’ll pay you more than that for the Pinot Noir.”

So Rochioli started delivering Pinot Noir to us back in 1973, and for years we were the only winery that got any of that Pinot Noir. You know, Joe is one of the better farmers around here; he really is up on everything. He is meticulous, he doesn’t let things go, and he’s interested in quality. He’s right on the same page that we’re on. We’ve been buying Pinot Noir from Joe every year since 1973.

We don’t get all of them anymore by any means even though he’s planted more, because Williams-Selyem came along, and he

agreed to sell them some. Then Gary Farrell, who was my winemaker at the time, and had been for 20-some years, wanted to know if I would object if he bought some of Joe's grapes. I said, "No," because we were getting more than we could really handle at that time. I think we got almost 50 tons in 1979, and that was too much for us as far as marketing was concerned. Now we crush over 100 tons. I wish we had more of Pinot.

START-UP

HICKE: Back in 1973, what was your first step after you bought the property?

BYNUM: The first step was to get a use permit. We didn't want to put any money into re-furbishing the place, and there was a lot that had to be done. Basically, the first step was to do cosmetic things. Finally on the 12th of July I remember, we got our use permit.

HICKE: You didn't have the problems that you had in St. Helena?

BYNUM: No. There were no protests, none of that.

[Weather interruption]

BYNUM: On September 12th we crushed our first grapes, but we had too much to do — a really massive job of getting this place ready and getting the equipment installed. I remember the first year I would shuttle back and forth from here to Albany so much, because we were moving out from down there. I was getting a new tasting room with a different location, so I contracted with Robert Stemmler. I forget how I happened to come across Bob. I had met him prior to that at some point, so he agreed to come in and sort of hold Hampton's hand. Hampton was just really

starting in winemaking even though he had worked for me since he was 16 years old and still in high school.

HICKE: Can you describe in detail what was here, and what you did with it?

BYNUM: There were three buildings. There were two hop kilns. Then there was a main building which was a packing plant, which had three floors, including the basement. The county made us take the roofs — they were gabled roofs, and they were all tied together with steel bars, cross bars — yet the county made us take those three roofs off, and put one roof over the whole thing. They thought for earthquake stability that was the best thing to do. We did that, and it was very costly. I had raised money by selling shares to people whom I knew.

HICKE: Was it concrete flooring?

BYNUM: Only in the cellar. The main packaging room where they packaged their hops was wooden.

[Weather interruption]

HICKE: OK, we had just started to talk about what you were doing to your plant and equipment, and your relationship with Robert Stemmler.

BYNUM: We were doing things like I bought a used crusher, and I had it sand blasted and coated with epoxy, that sort of thing. We bought quite a few new, stainless steel tanks. We bought some wood tanks that we no longer use, and it was just a very, very busy two months. You can imagine it went on from early morning to late at night. We were all set to crush grapes, and PG&E didn't show up to hook up our power, and I said, "We've got grapes coming in Saturday, we have to have power." They said, "We can't get there till Monday." They were supposed to

have been there on Friday. I have a friend who was a vice president of PG&E in San Francisco. I called him and said, "Look, will you do something? We've got to get this squared away." And they came out. I don't think they were very happy with me, but they came out. So we crushed our first grapes and...

HICKE: Did you have the grapes contracted for on this first crush?

BYNUM: Yes. Well we had about two of our shareholders, Joe Rochioli was a shareholder and he still is, and we got quite a few grapes from Joe. We got Howie Allen's grapes, not all of them, but some of them. We got all of his Pinot Noir, and some of his Chardonnay, and then another grower in Dry Creek was part of our group and we got grapes from him.

HICKE: Who was that?

BYNUM: His name was Frank Scudder. He lives in Arizona now; he sold his place. We bought them from them. They just didn't put them in as part of a cooperative venture.

HICKE: This was all done in '73?

BYNUM: In '73, yes. We crushed 230 tons, roughly, that year.

HICKE: Mostly Pinot?

BYNUM: No, no. We crushed Pinot — that was before we knew how good the Pinot was. We crushed some Cabernet from Rochioli too. Cabernet out here is not always good because of the cool weather. Cabernet is a very light grape, but in '73 it was a good wine, and in '74 it was a great wine. After that we crushed his Cab for another year, then I think he bumped it all except a little which I guess they use there at the winery.

HICKE: Are we talking about Rochioli?

BYNUM: Rochioli, yes. So we had Cabernet, Pinot Noir, and we had Zinfandel from a ranch in Dry Creek not connected to the winery. And we crushed Merlot from Jack Long's up in Dry Creek. He wasn't connected with us either, but it was his first crop and we continued to get his Merlot off and on up until the '80s when our own started coming in. We also crushed Sauvignon Blanc from Rochioli and from the Harrison Vineyard farther down Westside Road.

HICKE: Is this a good climate for Sauvignon Blanc?

BYNUM: It is if you like it fruity — it has to be carefully trellised and pruned in order to really get the character and ripeness of the fruit.

HICKE: It needs a little more warmth and sun?

BYNUM: Yes, it normally does. It has a very distinctive, floral character, which turns me on, it really does.

HICKE: I tried to taste some when I came back last night and she said that you were sold out.

BYNUM: We're sold out! We reduced the amount of Sauvignon Blanc that we were making. We used to make 4,000 cases of it. In fact we made almost 5,000 cases one year. We got most of our grapes — in fact at that time we were getting all of our grapes from the Junior College Farm, which was across the river, Shone Farm. It's an experimental farm that the J.C. [Santa Rosa Junior College] uses for training their students, and they have all sorts of trellising techniques and pruning techniques.

There was one block of about five acres that was done on what they call the Geneva Double Curtain, and we liked the fruit from

that area better than the fruit from rest of it. So we told them we would give up all the rest of our Sauvignon Blanc — Benziger got it because they get fruit from them too — if we could just have that one five-acre block. So we get anywhere from 20 to 25 tons a year, and it makes roughly 1,500 to 1,600 cases. So we run out of that usually at least four months before we can put any more on the market. And we don't push it. We sell most of it in the tasting room and in the restaurants.

HICKE: Apparently good stuff!

BYNUM: It is good, really is. It's nice. It's different. If you go out to Livermore, where Wente Brothers is, and get a Sauvignon Blanc out there from their old, home vineyard, it's totally different. Both are good wines, but a totally different experience.

HICKE: So those first years you were buying your grapes.

BYNUM: That's correct. Except for the St. Helena vineyard which I sold in 1976.

HICKE: When did you start planting?

BYNUM: We planted our first grapes in '84. But planting in '84 we didn't get anything until about '87, '88. The first Merlot we kept separate and made an estate Merlot in 1989.

LABEL DESIGN

HICKE: Did you design your new label yourself?

BYNUM: Not the new one, no. The first label I designed was really funky. It never would have made it in today's market. Then I designed a different label, but I had an artist put it all together for me. We

used that label for quite a few years until we hired a designer to come up with a new label for us, which she did and which some people loved and some people hated. I never cared much for it myself, but everybody else at the winery liked it. I figured what the heck, I'm too old-fashioned to judge a good label. Then we used that — it had sort of a lightening flash across the front of the label, which was supposed to be the Russian River. Every once in a while we would come out with a label with one of my wife's paintings on it. That was for some special wine.

Then we totally re-designed it a few years ago and had a professional designer do it. I think it is the one that we have at the present time. You've seen them down in the tasting room.

HICKE: Yes.

BYNUM: I think it's a very handsome label. It's all from one painting of my wife's and every year we use a different section of the same painting. Every year, not vintage year, but every year that we are bottling wine, whether it's a '97 or '99 or 2000. If it's bottled in that year, it's going to have that — but that's basically what we are going to release into the market at roughly the same time. That's basically the evolution of the label. I finally have one that I really like.

SALES AND DISTRIBUTION

HICKE: Where were you selling your wines the first years up here on the Russian River?

BYNUM: We had just signed a contract a year earlier with a marketing firm named Huntington & Rice. They had a great deal of success with another winery but then — the other one was quite large compared to us. Then we had just shipped our first shipment for

them, 400 cases or something like that. Then they got into a big legal battle with the other winery that they were representing. The upshot of the whole thing was that the distributor went bankrupt, folded up their business.

HICKE: That wasn't Carneros Creek was it?

BYNUM: No, it was Weibel. So that was an unhappy experience obviously. Then we had a fellow that I had known, he was in the importing business, named Bonsal Seggerman, and he represented us in some markets with some success, an indifferent success. Our marketing was terrible.

Then we went with a big company named Shaw-Ross, and they operated out of Miami. They were importers, and we were, at that time, their only domestic wines. In the first year they sold a lot of wine, then the whole thing — it was still in the pipeline so to speak — then I had a person who worked for them — they owned Southern Wines and Spirits, a big nation-wide distributor — and one of the people who worked for them convinced me that since he was quitting, I should break with them and go with him. That was a huge mistake.

Our big problem was that we were a very small winery, and we were dealing with people who were used to dealing with hundreds of thousands of cases of wine. And this is one of the dilemmas of a small winery — first finding a niche, but then finding someone who understands you and who will sell your wine. Now a place like Southern Wines and Spirits, if you allocated 2,000 cases a year to them, or 3,000 cases a year, that's a drop in the bucket. They don't really understand your product; they don't understand premium wines, and they don't pay much attention to you.

[End Tape 3, Side B]

[Begin Tape 4, Side A]

BYNUM: That's the unfortunate truth of marketing. There are small wineries, small to medium-sized wineries, which have had very successful brokers who sell their wines. After leaving Southern Wines and Spirits we joined up with Parliament Imports. They operated out of Atlantic City and we were with them for a long, long time; we couldn't break the contract, they had us pretty well locked up.

HICKE: They weren't satisfactory either?

BYNUM: No, they just didn't understand us. They were — once again — selling to liquor distributors instead of wine people.

HICKE: East Coast mostly.

BYNUM: Mostly East Coast, as a matter of fact. For years there we weren't in any of the major urban markets. We weren't even in New York except for a very brief period. We were in New Jersey, but mostly in the casinos. It was a bad situation.

Finally, about six years ago, I hired a woman named Christina Welling, and she had a lot of wine background. She had been at the Wine Center in New York, and she also had worked for Freixenet. She just had a lot of background in wine, and she came to work for us, and is still working for us, and she totally re-structured everything.

HICKE: She works out of the winery here?

BYNUM: She works here. She's on vacation right now, in Mexico. At that time we were producing about 22,000 cases of wine annually and we had done as much as 32,000 cases. It put such a strain on the physical plant here because we were letting Gary Farrell make his wine, charging him per ton to do it, and our assistant

winemaker was also making some wine here, and it was way too much for this building.

HICKE: Were the distributors pressing you to make more?

BYNUM: Well, they did at first, and then they wanted us to make White Zinfandel. I had about as much interest in White Zinfandel as Coca Cola. I wouldn't do it, I mean we did for a while just to satisfy them and keep the cash flow going, but it was an unhappy experience.

Then they wanted us to make a lot of other wines and they didn't want us to charge more than this, then they wanted us to reduce our prices even more, and make more wine. Well, that was the year we made 32,000 cases, and I lost more money that year.

We started cutting back. We were doing about 22,000 cases when Christina came in and said, "We're going to cut down to about 15,000 cases." There are advantages to that, because you have fewer bottles, fewer labels and fewer corks to buy.

We cut down and it also enabled us to buy more new barrels. With our red wines we have about 35 percent new barrels every year and with Chardonnay, about the same thing. And Sauvignon Blanc we don't put in barrels. But she was very successful in placing us with distributors who understood what we were doing, and that we were striving for quality. She kept increasing our prices; so now I'm astounded at the prices we charge for the wine and which we get. The only justification is that I think the wines are really good.

But that's so far from the original concept I had of producing everyman's wine for the university staff that it took me a long time, and everybody fought me for keeping the prices down. I said, "We can't do that." They wanted to push the prices up. We put out a lot of money for new barrels and other new bottles,

new design and things cost us more, and so in order to justify it we've raised prices. We have a wine that sells for \$75 and we sell out of it, but we are only making 150 cases of it.

HICKE: Let's pursue this marketing topic. We are not proceeding very chronologically but I think it's also good to go by subject. When you started selling your wines, how did you establish this price niche for everyman's wine?

BYNUM: What I did was figure my costs, including any bulk wine I bought or grapes, plus the bottling costs. Then I would double that and add maybe 25 percent. It still came out ridiculously low.

HICKE: Did you investigate what the competition was doing?

BYNUM: There wasn't any competition. We were selling it all in our tasting room. For the first four or five years, we sold everything out of the tasting room.

HICKE: How did the word of your tasting room get out?

BYNUM: Through a promotion — my wife would sit and address promotional letters to the university staff — and then by word of mouth.

HICKE: So you had the tasting room in Albany from the very beginning?

BYNUM: Yes. That was the whole point of the thing. That was the only way we were going to afford to get into the wine business, to start selling wine right away.

HICKE: Did you have it open six or seven days a week?

BYNUM: Seven. The first three or four months I was there every day, including Sunday, and then I got somebody to take over Sunday.

HICKE: Did you sell out every year?

BYNUM: Well, that was a situation when you are buying bulk wine, you don't sell out because you can go and buy more bulk wine and bottle it. But yes, we would sell out, because we would buy bulk wine and make certain blends, and when that was gone we'd have to go into another blend. Once in a while it was a super wine, and other times it wasn't quite as nice. But it was always drinkable. That was the criterion. If I didn't like drinking it myself, we wouldn't sell it.

HICKE: After six years or so...

BYNUM: I think we sold our first wine out in the marketplace — it was probably '69 or '70. That would have been about five years. That was a big mistake, a big mistake. We didn't have the facility there to handle that volume. I think I mentioned yesterday with the Barefoot label there was one distributor who wanted 800 cases. Well, I thought that was wonderful, but it wasn't. You had to sell it to them at a low price, and by the time you got it all bottled and the cost of that — so we didn't do much distribution at all until we moved up here and started producing everything on our own.

HICKE: OK, when you said the first six years, you were talking about Albany?

BYNUM: Yes, up here we didn't have a tasting room at all for at least three years, I guess. Some people did come up and wanted to buy wine, and we would sell it to them, but there was not a tasting room per se.

HICKE: So you only sold through these marketing distributors that you have been telling me about. Did they sell to restaurants?

BYNUM: They sold most of it to retail outlets, I think. And the other thing that Christina has done for us is that she said, "OK, we're going to dictate to these distributors, and we want them to sell 70 percent to restaurants and 30 percent to retail outlets." And she's been successful in that.

HICKE: Sounds as if now that the winery is in control, instead of getting wagged by the tail.

BYNUM: That's right. You know I blame myself on that, because I was not a businessman, I was not an aggressive salesperson, and I felt I really wanted to sell the wine any way that we could. I didn't have the guts to tell a distributor, "You do it this way if you want our wine." And now we have people who want our wine, and we can tell them what to do with it.

The good news is, as I said yesterday, that we succeeded in selling 70 percent of our wine to restaurants. The bad news is that restaurants are having a problem right now and have ever since September 11th, so it's quite slow. Our tasting room is not slow, but our distribution is quite slow. It's beginning to pick up again. Our biggest markets are in New York, New Orleans and Los Angeles.

HICKE: Do you do any exporting?

BYNUM: Very little. We have a distributor in Switzerland. We have a distributor in Germany. We have one in the Bahamas, and we have one in Japan, but they're not doing much right now. And we had one in England, we had Freixenet, the Spanish Champagne house, but they've dropped all domestic wines. They only go with their own wine now. But it did give me a good excuse to go to London. My wife and I spent three weeks there. I went to some of their wine affairs. Now we have a new distributor in Quebec, and we were about to go with a distributor

in Puerto Rico, but there again September 11th cut them short. Their tourist trade has really dropped off.

So, we're making about 15,000 cases a year and I think what we'd like to do is to gradually reduce the number of wines — in fact we just quit making Cabernet this year, except for the little bit I get off of our own vineyard. The reason I planted that was to blend with the Merlot, and it turned out that the Merlot off this vineyard up here doesn't need Cabernet to back it up. It's already a big wine. Did you taste it?

HICKE: I did. I'm not a Merlot fan but I thought it was very good, wonderful.

BYNUM: Well, good. It's unusual I think. So that leaves us with any given year we'll make anywhere from 200 to 400 cases of Cabernet, and we sell it all in the tasting room. We barrel age it for three and a half years before we bottle it, and we bottle age it. So from the time it's picked to the time it hits the market is about four and a half years.

HICKE: Is there anything more to be said about marketing and distribution?

BYNUM: I don't think so. I've never been good at that, although I've done a lot of traveling to visit distributors, and calling on accounts, and attending tastings at the distributor's office. I don't do that anymore, Christina does, but she likes doing that. I never liked it; I like it even less now that I'm older. Marketing was always something of a mystery to me, and the only thing I understood was my first marketing effort, which was selling wine at retail to the people at the university.

HICKE: And that worked very well.

BYNUM: It did work well.

A DIGRESSION: MAKING MEAD IN ALBANY

HICKE: I have this note about a Berkeley–Westside Road connection and that’s a topic Bo Simons suggested you talk about. I don’t know what it means.

BYNUM: I don’t know what it means either. I think it’s what we’ve been talking about, because if Marie put this together for you— did you put this together yourself?

HICKE: Yes.

BYNUM: How did you know about some of these things?

HICKE: I read the articles in the library and your winery press kit. The wine library has a wonderful file on you.

BYNUM: OK, but the Berkeley–Westside Road connection is probably just what we’re talking about.

HICKE: I thought there might be a hidden meaning.

BYNUM: No. I probably should mention something. We had a wine chemist named Ernie Lane, and he developed his own formula for making mead, and he wanted us to make mead. And it’s not my glass of wine, believe me. It was pretty good, it was fairly dry, and we created a market for this stuff.

HICKE: When was this?

BYNUM: Oh, it was in between 1970 and ’73, and we did have a market for it. We finally sold the rights to it for some of the Midwest to a law professor from the University of Indiana at Bloomington. He had a little winery there where he made hybrid wine — he had hybrid grapes, and he wanted to make mead, so we sold the

formula to him for the Midwest. Then when we moved up here we didn't do it anymore. So I sold the whole national rights to him.

HICKE: How do you make it?

BYNUM: Honey, water and corn sugar or sucrose and tartaric acid, I believe...

HICKE: It has nothing to do with grapes?

BYNUM: No, no grapes at all, just honey wine. It was just another experience, like the Barefoot wine thing, which I should have just turned my back on as far as doing anything except making it for fun. We used to sell it in gallon jugs to the Renaissance Pleasure Faire. We sold them about 800 gallons the first year we did it. They picked up all the gallon cases of mead, and I thought that was an effort, then they called me about a week later and said, "We're out of mead." So we forced the fermentation, gave it some heat to warm it up. From the time we had the raw material to the time we bottled it was two weeks.
[laughter]

HICKE: That's a great story. Did you sell it to them the next year?

BYNUM: We did it for two or three years. Then for some reason they went with wine, grape wine instead, which didn't fit in with the Renaissance concept. I was just as glad they did actually. So we dropped that — I was going to ignore that as I thought we maybe should. We made that in Albany, not here.

Then when we closed the Albany plant down we kept the tasting room, in Albany, but in a different location I think until about 1974, maybe '75. I finally just turned it over to the people who were working for me. One of them bought the other one out and had a successful little wine shop and restaurant together. Then

he sold that and he has a little winery now up in Fiddletown, in Amador County. And he's doing pretty well; I keep seeing his name...

HICKE: What is his name?

BYNUM: Bill Easton. It's interesting because another fellow who was working for me, Roger Dial who was really sort of a right-hand man, was a political science graduate student at Cal, he really loved the wine business. He was hooked on it. He loved making wine and drinking it, and he moved back to Nova Scotia and got a professorship there — he was hired to set up a Department of Asian Studies, which was his field, but being a person who thought first of wine and second of Asian studies, he found a place about 30 miles west of Halifax, a place called Grand Pré where they had grapes before, and once had a winery. He resurrected that, planted more grapes and had a wine business going there.

He was trucking in as well as growing his own grapes. He was trucking stuff from California all the way to Nova Scotia. So he had quite a business going there and apparently he ran through a bill through the provincial government there to permit tasting of the wine at the winery, which they hadn't had. But apparently, he claims that it became so successful that the government wanted their piece of the pie, and claims they shut him down. You hear stories like that and think, "Could they do that?"

PRODUCING WINE

Gary Farrell

BYNUM: Everybody who worked at the winery in one way or another got really interested in wine. When Gary Farrell first came here, he came with a buddy of his named Scott Harris, and both came to work for us in 1974, and neither one knew anything about wine.

HICKE: Where did you find Gary?

BYNUM: I think my daughter first knew him. Her fiancé had hired Gary and Scott to do some work for him. He had an antique business. So she got married, and then Gary came to work over here with Scott. They were cellar rats basically. Scott later quit, went back to Davis, got his degree in enology, and was hired as winemaker for Arbor Crest, up near Spokane, Washington. But I think he always liked beer better than wine, and he is now in the hops business. [laughter]

Gary, on the other hand, took a lot of short courses at Davis and we sort of held his hand while he was learning to do this. He was always very conscientious, and in 1978 when my son Hampton, who had been the winemaker, decided he wanted to do his own thing, Gary asked me if he could be winemaker. At that time I was still basically the winemaker, in the sense that I always oversaw everything. I said, "Sure, especially if you take the record-keeping off of my hands." And he did. He became the winemaker, and Gary conscientiously shepherded our wines in a way that they probably had never been taken care of before.

HICKE: What is his special talent? Can you put your finger on it?

BYNUM: He has a good palate, number one. He has the organization to do anything he wants to do, I think. He's very organized, and he liked the grapes we were getting, and he learned more and more about the grapes and vineyards. I can't pinpoint it; I don't really think you can. He never went through the full course in enology at Davis.

HICKE: Which goes to prove that it's not necessary.

BYNUM: Of course not. People like Tom Rochioli never took a course in that, and he is a very good winemaker. The only courses I ever took were just those I took myself from everything that was available back when I was a home winemaker. But Gary is very good; he did a good job for us, and I'm glad that he has his own place now.

He took in an investor who bought 20 percent of the winery, and he parlayed that into a new building that is quite impressive, let's put it that way. I would feel very uncomfortable making wine there myself, not only because I could see the overhead, but also it's just not my style. He's continued to consult with our new winemaker, who is a Davis graduate; his name is David Georges, and he graduated both in enology and viticulture, so he's really invaluable.

But Gary made himself very available his first year. Actually, I paid Gary as a consultant for the first year. We still have a very good relationship, and I think that he's doing something that he is really comfortable with, and I'm doing something I feel comfortable with. I didn't feel comfortable trying to accommodate all of his needs and the needs of Will McElroy, who is our assistant winemaker — I let them both make wine here, which was probably a mistake.

I told David when he came to work to not even think about putting out his own label. It's been so nice to have the winery to

ourselves and not have to worry about other people's wines. We have plenty of tanks now. We have more than enough tanks — everything came at once at one point, and we were short of fermentation space when all of us were here. It was just too much. It was too much.

[End Tape 4, Side A]

[Begin Tape 4, Side B]

Robert Stemmler

HICKE: Since we're on the topic of winemakers, you haven't talked about the role of Hampton, and your role during this transition.

BYNUM: I was the original winemaker, and then Hampton took over those duties after we moved up here. And as I think I said yesterday, Hampton had support from Robert Stemmler for the first year, for 1973.

Pinot Noir

HICKE: Wasn't Stemmler helping with the conversion of the building to a winery?

BYNUM: He was really teaching Hamp is what he was doing. He was so enamored with the Pinot Noir grapes that we got from Joe Rochioli. He was just exclaiming about them all the time. He was trying to make wine, and we still had construction crews in there, and there was a welder who was working and he almost set the building on fire, and there was smoke from the welding and the roof work. Stemmler was walking around cursing in German and saying, "This is no way to make wine!" [laughter]

But he really encouraged us to pursue Pinot Noir. He really did like it a lot. So that was our first year and first experience with Pinot, and it turned out very well. In fact I have a friend who has five bottles of the '73, and he's trading them back to me for some newer wines. The last time I tasted it — I took my last bottle and opened it for a group press people, wine writers who came up, there were seven of them I think, and they were just blown away by this 1973 wine. This was done seven years ago.

HICKE: Did it get reviewed by any rating groups?

BYNUM: We used to get a lot of nice reviews in the Washington D.C. press, believe it or not. One of those wine writers really liked our Pinot Noir, and we got other reviews on it also. One of them came in first in a tasting that the *Washingtonian Magazine* put on. This is way back, '75 maybe '76.

HICKE: Was that when it was bottled?

BYNUM: I can tell you, we bottled it in the spring of '75. More recently we have been bottling the Pinot younger, but we're going back to a little more aging in the barrels before we bottle it. We're doing some, but we aren't going to bottle until February I think for the year 2000 vintage. So we're experimenting, and we'll see how that goes. I like doing it that way. I think it made a better wine.

HICKE: How long was Stemmler here?

BYNUM: Stemmler was here for about six months. He consulted with us for that period of time. We kept in contact with him, because we bottled some wine for him under his own label when he was first starting out.

Hampton Bynum

HICKE: Then Hampton took over?

BYNUM: Then Hampton took over with my help — along with him to see what was going on. We always, for promotional purposes, say '78 was the year that Gary started making the wine, as he was very much involved with it from that point, but it probably wasn't until 1980 that he became winemaker. That transition was — we have had a consistency, I think, of style, and regardless of who our winemaker is, that style has been maintained. In the first place it had something to do with my knowing what I wanted, then in recent years I think it had a lot to do with Hampton and my guidance so to speak of working with the winemaker to make sure that we keep the style the way it is.

Winemaking Style

HICKE: Can you describe your style?

BYNUM: I think mainly it is a style which — the wine is not made just to impress people as just a wine, so to speak. It's made to go with food. If there were any way to describe it I would say it is in more of the European style. For so many of these things — well, you see it in the Napa Valley a lot where they have heavily oaked Cabernets, heavily oaked this and that, and the Chardonnay, it's a wine that is intended to impress people just because of individual character, whereas our goal is to make a wine that is a really good accompaniment to food. Some of those wines I wouldn't drink with food.

HICKE: Do you bring the fruit forward?

BYNUM:

Yes, it's very important. We still do some experimentation with our winemaking style. And things have changed since we first made Pinot Noir too. In those days when we just crushed and fermented the grapes, we went through various styles of leaving some of the stems in to get more tannin, because Pinot Noir doesn't give up its color very easily.

I didn't care very much for that, and I remember talking to Bob Stemmler, I think it was, not in a professional capacity, but just about him making his own wine, his own Pinot Noir, and he said in Europe they put stems in, but in Europe by the time they harvest, the stems are all dry. But here they're still green, and so they put too much tannin in the wine.

We've got through that stage to whole-berry fermentation, whole-cluster fermentation. For instance we crush some of the grapes, and then we'd add whole clusters, uncrushed, just to the fermenting tank. Most recently the crushers that we have used do not crush the grapes, they just de-stem, and so they don't go through a crusher. Then the grapes go into the fermenting tank.

The most recent thing is cold soaking, which has become a major way of extracting color and character I think. What we do is just put the grapes in the fermenter, and then we add dry ice to it. We buy dry ice in cubic yard containers, and we shovel that in and keep the wine cold for about three days before you start fermentation.

Those are some of the things that have evolved since we first started making wine. We had some good Pinots: the '73 was very good, the '75 was outrageously good, and '78 was a wonderful wine, and there have been many vintages which were wonderful. As a matter of fact, we're going to be putting on a seminar in February. There's going to be a lot of wine writers and wine people from all over the country coming out for it, and

we're going to be tasting some of our wines from the 1973 all the way up to the current vintage which is 2000.

HICKE: So you need those '73 Pinot bottles back.

BYNUM: Yes, I really need them. [laughter]

HICKE: I've always read that Pinot is an extremely difficult wine to make.

BYNUM: It's a very touchy grape. It doesn't respond in the same way that other grapes do. Well, like this cold soaking business: it takes time, it takes extra money, all of that, but you never want to ferment it too cold or ferment it too hot either. Some grapes you can get away with fermenting warm. I don't think it [Pinot Noir] is for everybody. It's has to be done very, very carefully.

One of the things we've wanted to do — we've already ordered the equipment — is to stop pumping wine. We used to use impeller pumps, and when the wine plugged up when you were filtering, it would really work over the wine. We have a diaphragm pump now that is very gentle on the wine. And we're going to a nitrogen or argon gas system, which will use pressure that will push the wine, so there will be no pumping at all. The other thing, which I've always wanted to do, is to set up our cellar in such a way that we can do mostly gravity flow. So for the crushing, of Pinot Noir especially, this is what we used to do — put the crusher on top of the fermenting tank and just crush it. But that was not a gentle process.

Now what we do is de-stem it, but you don't crush the berries and put them in the tank and when you drain, you go gravity down to the next level. Now it's difficult for us to do that, because while we have two levels, we really need a third level. I know where I want to do it, across over in the apple orchard.

HICKE: In the dry ice method, after the grapes are in the tank, is there separation of the juice and...

BYNUM: Yes, while it's fermenting and even before it starts fermenting, you're getting some separation, some maceration of the grapes themselves. The other thing we do is extended maceration. After the fermentation takes place, you leave it on the skins. You do everything you can to extract the true character of the grape. I'm talking about Pinot Noir now.

HICKE: Where did these new methods come from?

BYNUM: Cold soaking is something that we've done for maybe four or five years. We did not use the dry ice until three years ago. We just tried to pick the grapes when they were cold, and sometimes we just stopped picking in the mornings when it started to warm up. Then you get them in the tank and let them go as long as possible before fermenting. I'm sure people have used dry ice much longer than we have, maybe not, I don't know, but we've used it for the last three years and like the results.

HICKE: So you've evolved this method here?

BYNUM: Yes, but I'm sure other people have done it. The way we do it is something we developed ourselves. But I know that Wine Country Gases, where we buy our dry ice, I've seen their trucks going around stacked high with this stuff, so I know that other wineries are using the same method.

HICKE: OK, did we finish with Hampton? He went away and came back.

BYNUM: Yes, he came back in the mid-'80s probably. Then he just gradually evolved — he got over sowing his wild oats or whatever he was doing, traveling around, and he came back and he just gradually has taken on more responsibility, taken some of my responsibilities way from me. So he, more or less, manages

the day-to-day wine matters, the day-to-day operations at the winery. And I get called on for all of the headaches. [laughter]

HICKE: Still putting out fires?

BYNUM: Yes, I put out fires. [laughter] I take care of financing and all of that.

HICKE: Back into bookkeeping?

BYNUM: No, we have an accountant or bookkeeper, who is a CPA, and basically I make arrangements with banks or money institutions for lines of credit. We're constantly switching those things around.

Cabernet Sauvignon and Other Wines

HICKE: We've talked primarily about Pinot. You told me a little about Cabernet and Sauvignon Blanc...

BYNUM: Cabernet, we're getting out of that business. As I said, we cut down two years ago; we had a nice vineyard down the road where we were getting our grapes. But Westside Road, except in rare years, isn't really good Cabernet country. Not like Napa or Alexander Valley, and we just started cutting down on it. Two years ago we only took in five tons. That's just enough to put into a Meritage that we were making. This last year we didn't get any, except off our own vineyard. I don't know, I've always liked Cabernet. I think the reason I keep what little we have up here on the hill is because I do like the wine, if it is aged properly and for a long enough time. But I've gotten to the point where I am more partial to Pinot Noir. So I've sort of lost interest in a sense.

One of my problems always has been that I like making wines, and I don't care if it was Cabernet or Pinot or Zinfandel or what, I like to make a wine just to see what it was like, maybe Syrah, maybe Petite Sirah, or something like that. In fact in our vineyard in St. Helena we had Charbono, about three acres of it, and in 1974 we made a lovely wine from them.

HICKE: What happened to the Charbono?

BYNUM: We sold the vineyard, and everything in that vineyard has been torn up and re-planted. Whitehall Lane Vineyards built a winery there on that property. So I'm not really excited about Cab at this point.

HICKE: What other wines are you making?

BYNUM: Zinfandel, and I like a good Zinfandel and I like making it.

HICKE: Do you have the grapes on your property?

BYNUM: We buy the grapes. We buy everything except the Bordeaux varieties, and now I've planted three acres of Chardonnay that we'll probably get a crop off of this year. But we're cutting back; we've gotten to the point where half of what we make now is Pinot Noir, and I want to get to the point where 70 percent of what we make is Pinot Noir, maybe 20 percent Chardonnay and 10 percent Merlot. I did bump out half of our Merlot this year, but I'm keeping the other half for sentimental sake, so we'll continue to make that. I can envision a time when we probably will have just those three wines.

Vineyard Designation

HICKE: I believe you were the first winery on Westside Road. Is that correct?

BYNUM: Yes we were. When we moved up here, there were vineyards but there were no wineries, so we were the first on Westside Road. We were the first winery also to do something I'd always wanted to do which — I always admired the French appellations, the controlled appellation — and I always wanted to do something that would be the same here in California, so you would know just where the grapes came from.

We did this in 1973, in '74 I know, I guess I'm not sure about '73, I'd have to look at the label. But in '74, on our Pinot Noir label, for instance, and other wines, we say Russian River Valley, which was not an appellation at that time. It would say Sonoma County Pinot Noir, and then under that we'd say Russian River Valley, Rochioli Vineyard. We had a little copy at the bottom of the label where we identified the vineyard. And we try to do that with every one of our wines.

HICKE: Why and how did you come up with this?

BYNUM: Well, it was just because I always wanted to do something that would re-define the appellation or the origin of the grape. In France they do it, and why couldn't we do it here? Now one of the reasons we don't do it is because we take grapes from so many different places. But when you're in a fortunate situation such as we are, where you can actually say we got all of these grapes from the Rochioli Vineyard, or we got part of them from the Bynum Vineyard or part from the Moshin Vineyard down the road, it makes the wine a lot more interesting, to me it makes it more interesting.

HICKE: Yes, a lot of people have followed your lead on that.

BYNUM: I don't know how many have. I really don't. I'm embarrassed to say that I don't keep up as much with other labels as I should.

HOW WINERIES SURVIVE

HICKE: After you opened your winery here who came along afterwards?

BYNUM: I believe the next one was either Hop Kiln or Mill Creek, and those two were the other wineries on Westside Road; then Rochioli...

HICKE: About what time period, do you recall?

BYNUM: I think Hop Kiln started about 1975 and I think Mill Creek about the same time.

HICKE: They probably saw that you had a success here.

BYNUM: Well, I don't know whether that influenced them or if they wanted to make their own wine out of their own grapes. The grape market I know in '74 and '75 dropped, the prices dropped, so a lot of people were probably thinking if I could make wine out of — if you let yourself get carried away and sit down with paper, you can prove to yourself that you can just make a fortune in the wine business. You buy the grapes at this price and sell the wine at this price. The only problem is: whom do you sell it to? I think the only way we survived was to start out on a very small scale — start out without overburdening ourselves with overhead and fixed assets that weren't productive, so it worked out.

HICKE: And selling futures must have helped?

BYNUM: It did, it did. For instance, selling futures got to be a big thing. We call it deferred income on our balance sheet, and we don't call it a sale until after the wine is picked up. So we had over a half a million dollars of deferred income at any given time.

HICKE: But it's paid for.

BYNUM: Yes, it's paid for, but we can't count it as a sale for a long period of time. But we never sold a future until we were sure we had a good wine.

HICKE: Do you have barrel tastings?

BYNUM: We do have barrel tastings. But the only time we have barrel tastings for future sales is on the first weekend of March when the whole area, the whole Russian River area, has barrel tastings. But we always sell futures.

[End Tape 4, Side B]

[Begin Tape 5, Side A]

HICKE: Are futures available at any time or do you have a set selling period for them?

BYNUM: No, we have some available right now on our estate Merlot. I'm not sure what our next future will be. I think our barrel tasting this year will be a Meritage, and we will sell futures on that when the time comes.

GROWING GRAPES

Planting

- HICKE: There is one major topic that we haven't covered in detail and that is planting the grapes and when you got around to that.
- BYNUM: That was 1984. I planted only about seven acres for starters, and it was all Merlot, except for the little batch of Cabernet. I had seven acres of Merlot and about an acre of Cabernet.
- HICKE: How did you decide on Merlot?
- BYNUM: I had had people telling me that this was the greatest area for Merlot that you could imagine. And I wish I hadn't listened to them, because if I had planted Pinot Noir I would be way ahead of the game. I didn't start planting Pinot Noir until about 1988 maybe, '89. And now I'm bumping out Merlot to plant Pinot Noir.
- HICKE: Why didn't anybody tell you plant Pinot Noir at the time?
- BYNUM: There was all the Pinot available that we wanted at the time. Merlot — we were having real trouble getting. I'm not disappointed in the Merlot. It has distinctive character off our vineyard. I think it was about '88 that we started planting Pinot Noir. We have only about 20 acres of grapes up on the hill, and as I said, we have that other vineyard down by Mill Creek. Of the 20 acres up on the hill after we finish re-planting there will be about thirteen and half acres of Pinot Noir. Then three acres of Chardonnay and three and a half acres of Merlot.

Trellising

HICKE: What kind of trellising and spacing did you use?

BYNUM: On the Pinot Noir we use a vertical curtain, but we're going to change that, because we're getting too much exposure to the sun on the western side. So we will lower one of the wires to leave a flop-over curtain on the west side so the sun doesn't bake it in the afternoon, yet it will still be open on the east side to get the morning sun.

Our Merlot has always been done with a quadrilateral cordon, which has four arms going in either direction. Those are huge, vigorous vines that can handle that. But for Pinot you don't want to do that. Pinot Noir is as delicate to grow as it is to convert to wine. If I get three and a half tons to the acre on the Pinot Noir I'll be happy. I've gotten as much as seven tons to the acre with the Merlot. Not usually, but one year I did, in '97.

I have a neighbor, Gallo wraps around us, and his vineyard manager, I was talking to him one day, they planted some Pinot down here by Porter Creek Winery and he said he told them when he took over — he had degrees from all sorts of viticulture schools — and he said he could get 15 tons to the acre in that area that used to be a cow pasture down there. He said that they didn't believe him, but he did. Now I thought to myself, "Why would anybody want to get 15 tons to the acre of Pinot Noir?" There is no way that you are going to get quality. The numbers were great, but I said, "Taste the wine." You know it's just not going to be there.

Irrigation

HICKE: Did you have to irrigate when you first planted?

BYNUM: We did. We put in a drip system and we turn it on whenever the tips start to wilt a little bit. We irrigate, we drip for a few hours, you almost have to up on the hill. You could get by without it, but your grapes would ripen in a hurry. I'd say we do that about four, five times during the growing season.

Some Organic Farming Methods

HICKE: And you fertilize along with that?

BYNUM: We don't do too much fertilization. We have a program; we make compost tea, and we have equipment that we build ourselves to make compost tea. What you do is you fill these big drums with compost, which we also make, and then you drip water over them for about 24 to 48 hours. The resultant tea that comes out you can either put in your drip system or you can put in your sprayer and spray it on the vines. And the foliar application has proved to be very beneficial. So we use that.

We have certain biodynamic preps that we use. The one fertilizer we use is called Maxicrop. It's an organically acceptable fertilizer and it's very beneficial. We do everything through the drip system or with the foliar application.

Then we plant a cover crop and the cover crop consists of probably seven or eight different plants, most of which are nitrogen fixing. A couple or three clovers, then there's vetch and different peas. And the peas we harvest too. So that's mainly our maintenance program in the vineyard. Then we lime the soil

whenever it needs it. Not every year by any means. I'm sort of hoping that this cover crop and the various biodynamic preps that we use are going to make liming unnecessary.

HICKE: Let's talk more about organic farming, because I know this is a big and exciting thing with you.

BYNUM: We've never farmed other than organically, except we never so much knew what we were doing. [laughter] I know we weren't using pesticides other than sulfur. We dust with sulfur, and that's considered a pesticide, but it's considered organically acceptable. We don't use herbicides, no Roundup, no pre-emergent herbicides which kill the seeds, stop germination. So it's basically now — I did sow a cover crop of clover one year in the early '90s, but now for three years we've gotten into a program.

We've hired an organic ag advisor, his name is Bob Contisano, also known as "Amigo Bob", and he has clients all over northern California. He has gotten us into the cover crops, which he specified, but at first he also used some compost mixed with some oyster shell and various other things. We did that the last two years, and it's probably the last time we'll have to do that for a while. But the cover crop we'll continue to put on, building up humus in the soil. It's also fixing nitrogen in the soil.

The other thing that he did was to have us — we built these berms, and then planted insectary plants on the berms. They attract predator insects, like little wasps and other things that go after the bad guys, like the glassy-winged sharpshooter, which we haven't had yet up here, and the regular sharpshooter, which is not a major factor on our hill because they love riparian areas. But they go after everything else. In theory they go after the glassy-winged sharpshooter and any of the egg clusters that they leave. What they do is lay their own eggs in these egg clusters.

We counted 18 beneficial insects at one point last year. There were five different kinds of wasps; there were ladybugs and all sorts of things.

HICKE: And they were all attracted by the insectiary plants?

BYNUM: Yes, and at one time the insectiary plants on the berms were beautiful. A lot of cosmos was planted in long rows alongside the road. We also planted in our permaculture garden quite a few plums and prunes, and they're a vector for the glassy-winged sharpshooter, but they don't get any farther than that.

We try to do everything we can to avoid using poisons. I see some vineyards; they have been using Roundup now for years. That soil looks dead. The people across the road from us spray their vineyard to death. They're in there all the time.

HICKE: Does that spread to your vineyard?

BYNUM: It doesn't affect our vineyard because we are way up on the hill. It sure affected my wife and me. They'd always tell us when they were going to spray, which was good of them, but we would close up everything and occasionally use it as an excuse to go stay somewhere else like out at River's End or over at the Farmhouse Inn.

The Permaculture Project

HICKE: You mentioned your permaculture project. Can you talk about that?

BYNUM: Yes, it's one that I got into a little bit reluctantly, because I had planned to plant some grapes there on that three, three and a half acre parcel. But I was put to shame by my son [laughter] who

said, "We're going to be a monoculture just like everybody else around here." And it's fun; it's fun except it has cost us a lot of money at this point. Hopefully, next year we'll start getting some of it back. I think my daughter-in-law and a friend of hers are going to take over the management of it.

HICKE: Tell me about the concept.

BYNUM: It's a concept — you have berms and swales, and the swales catch water and you plant on the berms...

HICKE: Which is a raised row...

BYNUM: Yes, they're raised two and a half, three feet. And behind these berms water accumulates during storms. The whole principle is that no water runs off the property, but I can't imagine with this kind of rain now that some of it isn't running off the property. It creates some vernal ponds which are filled with frogs, and we plant — just an example of some of the things that we planted — on the berms we have figs, we have ground cherries and we have some capers, which I want to increase because they got mistreated last year. One of the workers up there didn't know what they were, and he covered them up with about six inches of compost.

HICKE: Are they a bush?

BYNUM: They're a bush, but they are very low growing and spreading, I mean they will spread out eight feet. They have a little flower, which then becomes the seedpod, which is very small, and then the seedpod grows. So you end up with a — my wife said, "Who's going to harvest these things?" It's a good point for sure. So you end up with the pod, an inch long, you see them sometimes in pickles, or you see them sometimes in a restaurant. They will bring out one pod.

HICKE: Are the capers that you buy in a store the seeds that are in this pod?

BYNUM: No, no they're not. They're the little buds. The taste, the flavor is so incredible, it tastes like a pickled caper without the vinegar and salt, and it's a wonderful flavor. I know if we can really get those things going that we'll have a market with restaurants.

Then in addition to that we have things like water chestnuts that grow in the vernal ponds, behind the berms where water usually accumulates. We have sunchokes, which are Jerusalem artichokes. We have a thing called yacon, which is like a big Irish, russet potato or maybe bigger. It's just like jicama; I think it has a nicer flavor than jicama.

Then we have oca, which is another root vegetable, and you can also use the leaves. Oca is sort of like a potato, and they have a very crisp character. You can eat them raw or cook them. Then we have some thing I love, and I'm going to plant as many as I can, called ground cherries. They are related to the tomatillos, so they come in a little heart shell, which a tomatillo has, and they have a little berry inside which just has the most delightful flavor. In Hawaii they use it to make poa hoa jam, and that is a great story because I collected enough to make some jam, and I crushed them and I put them in with sugar, and I tasted them and god, it was awful. I had put salt instead of sugar. [laughter] I don't know how — it was terrible. So next year...

We planted pomegranates; we planted gooseberries; we planted something called honeyberries, which are like a blueberry but very elongated and part of the honeysuckle family. We planted mulberry trees. We planted some citrus like blood oranges and Kefir limes.

HICKE: Do you plant so many different things to see what will work?

BYNUM: Yes, and strawberries. We probably have 2,000 strawberries up there. We want to see what — and we have lemon grass, which my daughter-in-law, being Thai, uses in her cooking all the time. We were going to harvest it, but now I found out that it only brings 50 cents a pound. So I said, “Forget it.”

We have some other things. We have echinacea; you can use the root. We have something called a Japanese raisin tree, and I haven’t the vaguest idea of what it is or what it’s going to produce. I have no idea. Then just this year in the swales, in those that weren’t accumulating too much water, we planted potatoes and things like that, which we just use for our own purposes.

HICKE: You have so many exotic things.

BYNUM: I think that’s what’s going to make them desirable for restaurants. I think if a restaurant tried yacon they wouldn’t go to jicama anymore. Rick Bayless is a very well known chef in Chicago. He has a television program, and he came out to do a dinner for the Sonoma County Winegrowers, I guess. The dinner was held up at Geyser Peak in their picnic area, and he had a salad that had these little things on them, and I said, “Those look like ground cherries.” They were ground cherries, and they were nowhere near as good as ours, really, and I’m not saying that just to act proud or anything like that.

So we talked to him, Susie, my daughter, went up and talked to him about the ground cherries and he said, “Well, they’re native back there in the Illinois area, the Midwest.” They use a lot of them, but they weren’t anywhere as sweet or flavorful as the thing that we have, which brings me back to the Russian River Valley. I think it is exceptionally unusual in that the intensity of the varietal character is so different than it is anywhere else.

HICKE: Can you attribute that to anything?

BYNUM: I don't know, I guess it's the climate more than the soil, because we have so many different kinds of soil around.

HICKE: Has anybody else picked up on your idea of planting different things?

BYNUM: I doubt it. Everybody is bumping out everything else. We planted apples also, not many, about a dozen, special varieties of apples, red-fleshed apples. We have, as I say, prunes, some peaches and those are all not only to market at a farmers' market, but also to attract and protect us against the glassy-winged sharpshooter. You know, I really think that when everybody had diversity in their farms, there were probably fewer problems. But when you have a monoculture you have nothing but grapes as far as you can see. And if there is a problem, there is not going to be anything else to distract the problem pest.

Environmental Pilot Project

HICKE: You also have an environmental pilot project.

BYNUM: Oh, that's for the Cal EPA. What it is, we work with Cal EPA. I think Benziger is doing it, and I think Budweiser is, out in the Fairfield area. But it mainly is just a matter of using sustainable methods, recycling for instance. Recycling all your glass, all your paper, all your plastic and everything, which we do, but it's also converting to ways to save money on the electrical bill, not to save money but to save energy, and you convert as much as you can to lower wattage bulbs, fluorescents.

We have a whole program that we've outlined, and we are ready to put it into reality. It's a combination of solar photovoltaic cells and some seasonal streams running this time of year. They

have little generators that generate enough power to operate cash registers and things like that. And the only thing we couldn't do — we were going to convert all the offices, the tasting room, and the computers and everything to our photovoltaic power; we're still planning to do that, we just had to put it on hold, because there are economic circumstances that are related to what happened on September 11th.

So I think that is what the Cal EPA program is about. My son, Hampton, handled that, then he turned it over to a fellow named Richie Wights who works for us in the tasting room part time, and does this part time, the environmental thing. I think that basically is what the Cal EPA program is about. It's working with — we happen to be part of the pilot program, as we were already doing a lot of these things, as was Benziger. It's just a matter of sustainable life, so to speak, so you don't have a lot of waste products.

[End Tape 5, Side A]

[Begin Tape 5, Side B]

BYNUM: We were earlier talking about marketing.

HICKE: Yes.

BYNUM: I think we have come sort of full cycle, starting out as a cottage industry, so to speak. Starting out in Albany, and then getting into the corporate mentality, which we were never big enough to sustain. I wouldn't want to anyway, and now we're back to the cottage again. I mean we started with a small production, then we got up to 32,000 cases, and now we're down to 15,000. We're taking in more income at the lower level than we were at the higher level.

Back to Cal EPA — the Cal EPA is a state-sponsored program for energy efficiency, and they want a sustainable society is what they want. That's the ultimate goal. That's much more common in Europe than it is here — the idea of sustainability is much more common in Europe than it is here. You know, for years and years and years our country had places to expand into, and you'd waste the land then move on to another place.

HARVESTING

BYNUM: Let's see, [referring to the outline] I think we covered trellising, and canopy management. Machine harvesting, no way!

HICKE: You just don't believe in it.

BYNUM: Right. We used to buy some machine-harvested Cabernet and Chardonnay from over in the Alexander Valley

HICKE: You can tell the difference?

BYNUM: The grapes would come in, well, they were totally macerated before you ever got them, and yes, I could tell the difference. Well, we have some things that are interesting. We have the insectiary berms to attract predator insects, but we also put up owl boxes to attract owls. We just put them up about three months ago, and I saw my first owl in one of them the other day.

HICKE: During the day or night?

BYNUM: They were out in the daytime sitting on top of the owl box in the daytime. You know we have a lot of gophers up there, which I'm hoping they'll help to take care of — well, the first thing that showed up was a hawk, a red tail hawk, sitting on top of

one of the owl boxes eating a lizard. A little biological control!
[laughter] Except we're not out to get lizards. They're helpful.
We're going to be putting up a lot of blue bird boxes also.
They're beneficial. Not blue jays, but blue birds.

I think [referring to the outline] our main goal — we'll probably
expand production gradually, certainly to no more than 18,000
to 20,000 cases a year. Our main goal, and this sounds
egotistical, is to gain some international recognition for our
wine, for our Pinot Noir.

HICKE: You already have haven't you?

BYNUM: Well, yes, but I think that I want to be the best as far as the
quality is concerned. Now did you have any...

VI PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES

ORGANIZATIONS

HICKE: [Refers to outline] The next page has a lot of general items, some of which we've discussed, but I want to be sure to hear about your professional activities.

BYNUM: We're members of the Russian River Wine Road Group. We're not members of the Sonoma County Winegrowers. We're members of the Wine Institute. They have certain things that will help a winery. There's label approval, they run all that through for you, work with you on the phone to make sure it's OK. I think I was never a joiner; I wasn't a joiner in high school or college. I mean I had lots of friends. I did belong to a fraternity, but I never went because I wasn't interested in it. I think I joined a fraternity only to make my mother happy. [laughter] And that was about it.

I've not really joined any of the wine organizations. With the Russian River Wine Group, Celeste, in our tasting room, is the liaison, and she goes to all the meetings, and from that standpoint we participate in it. As far as my personal participation, I don't do it.

WINE IN SONOMA COUNTY

HICKE: Is there anything else here in Sonoma County or the general area?

BYNUM: Well, with regard to Sonoma County wineries, and the evolution of wine growing in Sonoma County, are you talking about historically?

HICKE: Yes.

BYNUM: There's a very good book written about it by Ernest Peninou, who is the uncle of a friend of mine. I knew of him before I knew his nephew, because Ernest Peninou used to work for Fountain Grove Winery I believe. He was a winemaker, and I think he probably — I never talked to him personally about this, I have met him — I think he may have been involved in the Pinot Noirs that Fountain Grove used to make in the late '30s and early '40s.

[Interruption]

COLLEAGUES

HICKE: [Refers to outline] I want to make sure that there's nothing on the outline that we haven't covered, or that you wanted to discuss. I see you have some notes on the back page.

BYNUM: You had asked about colleagues at other wineries. I'm not close to a lot of them. I am close to Gary obviously, and Joe Rochioli and his winery. Phil Staley. Do you know Phil?

HICKE: No.

BYNUM: He was the winemaker at Alderbrook and he has his own label now. They live on Westside Road. The Hafners of Hafner Winery in Alexander Valley. I know a lot of others, but I'm not terribly close to them.

PROLIFERATION OF WINERIES

BYNUM: One of the notes here refers to the evolution of winegrowing in Sonoma County, and this is something I am not terribly qualified to talk about. The area mainly in and around the city of Sonoma is where most of the early wineries and vineyards were.

HICKE: I mainly wanted to refer to the Russian River area and Westside Road.

BYNUM: It's a remarkable thing, the proliferation of wineries. When I first started the winery in 1965, I think there were 10 wineries in the Napa Valley bottling their own label, and 11 here in Sonoma County. That's amazing. And the wineries in Sonoma County at that time were mainly bulk producers. They bottled in jugs. So that's the growth and change in Sonoma County.

Encompassed in this whole concept of monoculture — I liked it better when it was family farms, they were really diverse. It wasn't unusual to find grapes produced — Rochioli, for instance, they grew beans, they grew prunes, and they grew hops. Grapes were just one aspect of their farm. I can remember one time going to see Joe, and his mother was still alive at that time — great ol' gal — and she said, "Oh, Joe is down in the grape field." You know they thought of it just as another field. This field had grapes in it. It was not a vineyard, but a grape field.

HICKE: That's really a succinct illustration of how things have changed.

BYNUM: Yes, and now I don't think Joe has anything but grapes at this point.

HICKE: I think you've put your finger on it — the evolution of a monoculture may be the most important change in Sonoma County.

BYNUM: Yes, I mean there are still dairies, but there is only a fraction of the dairies there used to be. I don't know if there — well, I did read a story in the PD (*San Rosa Press Democrat*) the other day about prunes, and they were just starting to bump out one of the last prune orchards. Now there is one more, I guess it's 40 acres. They used to have 2,000 acres of prunes. Actually I think it was more than that, 20,000 acres. In fact I think it was the prune capital of the world. They had 20,000 I think, and now after this next one is gone, there will be 40 acres left, and they're thinking about bumping that out too.

Also, you know the hops were a big thing at one time. This over-planting of grapes is going to result — and I wouldn't be surprised to see it happen next year — in fact I know there are some vineyards that had to sell their Chardonnay at a fraction of the price they were getting before, because their contracts had run out. I know one grower that sold them for \$650 a ton.

HICKE: Chardonnay?

BYNUM: Yes. We paid \$2,200 a ton for ours. So that kind of instability makes you nervous. The only reason for the instability is that everybody's wanted to get in on the act and plant grapes. In one sense, I suppose, you could say that it's good because it may bring the price of wine down. I've seen that before and it has never brought it down.

HICKE: I don't think that is what determines the price of wine anymore, from what little I know about it.

BYNUM: That's right, that's right. So we'll see. If we can make a profit with three acres of a diversified permaculture, that may open some eyes.

OTHER CHANGES IN THE WINE INDUSTRY

BYNUM: The changes in the wine industry from the 1960s to 2001 — I think the wines are better for the most part. The grapes — all of the things that most of the growers used to grow — a lot of the farmers were Italian, and they were looking for productivity, because there wasn't the concentration on varietal character, and what's best for our area. The best thing that ever happened to France probably was phylloxera, because when they re-planted they put in just the grapes they felt were right for them.

But you know, every one of these farms, Rochioli included, had a lot of French Columbard, some Chasselas, which is the Palomino grape, a lot of Carignane, and a lot of Petite Sirah. They just weren't thinking in terms of Pinot Noir, which is best for this area but a light producer. In truth, there is really a very narrow area here where Pinot Noir is best. And that's in this middle reach of the Russian River, because you get half way from here to Healdsburg, which is about four miles, and it begins to get warmer, and the Pinot isn't as good. From here down valley, there are not too many more vineyards down the river, but they're good, so it's a narrow area.

But there are good grapes for every area, and it's just that they didn't bother to plant them. You could get 12 tons to the acre of Columbard. Another name for it is West's White Prolific.
[laughter] So I think quantity was the big thing.

The technology — well there's obviously been a big influence from Davis on that. You have a much higher level of knowledge

on the part of winemakers, most of whom are Davis or Fresno State trained, and I don't think they always have heart. I think technology and — it takes both technology and heart, and intuition to make a good wine. You can turn out a perfect wine — technically perfect wine — I remember as a wine judge up at the State Fair, they had a dinner afterwards for the judges, and they came out with some nectarines for desert with some cheese and things. But the nectarines were these big, beautiful things. They were absolutely perfect looking; they didn't have much flavor. So one of us said to Maynard Amerine, "Maynard, these nectarines are just like your wines, they are technically perfect, but they don't have any flavor." [laughter]

The equipment — there have been some wonderful improvements, equipment-wise, both in the crushing of grapes and the pressing of grapes. The old Vaslin presses, we had two of them when we first started, one very small, and one larger, and they pressed the grapes by having the plates coming together until they pressed this very hard cake right there in the middle of the press. Then you break it up and do it again. It was hard on the grapes. The new presses have membranes in them, or bladders. You pump compressed air into this thing and it presses the juice out. It's much better. There are other presses that I am not familiar with that are even advanced beyond that.

The appellations — I think we discussed that and I like what's happened there.

Consumer attitude — I think there's just too much tendency to try to critically analyze a wine rather than enjoying it. You know, all of these rating games that they play, every different magazine gets into a rating game, every newspaper does, and you get people who are influenced by them. The *Wine Spectator* has always had a big influence on people. Robert Parker has; I tend to trust Robert Parker more than the *Wine Spectator*.

To me you lose the whole concept of wine as a food, and it's something that should be drunk with food and enjoyed with food. It doesn't have to be something that's rated 98 on a scale of 100. It can be a very good wine — I think there are some very good, inexpensive wines out there that come from Italy, that come from Australia, Spain, Chile, all these places. They're all technically advanced too, compared to what they used to be. And Australia has been a leader in vineyard management techniques. We've learned a lot from what Australia and New Zealand have done.

If I had my druthers I would wish that people would buy a wine, taste it, drink it and if they liked it, buy it again if it went with their style of food, rather than to read what somebody else says they should buy. It's like movie critics, and to some extent book reviews. Especially with movies, it's somebody's reaction to the whole thing, and then am I supposed to go to a movie just because somebody likes it? Or do I go see a movie because it has an appealing cast and an appealing story behind it?

[again referring to outline] Pressure from imported wines — it's minimal, it really is. People like imported wines and they should, and they should drink them, but I don't think imported wines, even if they are cheap, are going to put us out of business.

Next topic: advent of large corporate ownership — that I don't like. Say what you will about Gallo, and that's the biggest winery in the world, and yet it's family owned and I think that it has a family touch to it. I don't think it's possible for somebody to make as many cases as he does and take care of it the same way as a small winery can do. It's just not possible. You get grapes from all over the place. But at least somebody from the Gallo family is watching over that and making sure that it's done the Gallo way. Whereas with corporate farming and corporate winemaking, I don't think they give a damn. All they want to do

is protect their investment, get a good return on their investment. Some of them may find that they're not going to get that with the proliferation of vineyards.

Next: wine and health — I think there is increasing evidence that wine is healthy.

Next: the significance of judging and auctions — I think that the significance has faded. We're dropping out of the judging. We've had our share of gold medals and everything, but we just don't feel that it rewards us with anything. Sonoma County, we'll probably stay in the Harvest Fair, maybe we won't, I don't know.

Next: challenges of risk-taking in the wine business — that's what it's all about. It's a risk, it's a risk, there's no question about it.

Next: the future of winemaking — I made a note here that I see more polarization between quality and profit. I think it's going to become more — as it becomes tougher to make a profit, the quality of the wine is probably going to suffer some. This is on a corporate level again; I'm not talking about the small, family wineries, of which there aren't as many as there used to be.

HICKE: So the future is a mixed bag, is that what you're saying?

BYNUM: Yes, the future is a mixed bag. I don't know what to expect from it. I think we can expect an increased interest in wine from people, and increased sales because of it, but I hope it will become something that is just a natural accompaniment to food, and it isn't something that people have to drink because someone else gave it a score of 92, which is a very subjective thing anyway.

HICKE: OK, that seems like a good note to end on, and I can't thank you enough for spending all this time. I appreciate it.

BYNUM: OK, thank you, it's been very interesting for me.

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